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PRACTICAL AND FAMILIAR

SERMONS.

VOL. IV.



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TO

JOHN WILLING WARREN, Esq.

IN TESTIMONY OF

A FRIENDSHIP,

WHICH IS NOT MORE STRONGLY CEMENTED

By an Intimacy for nearly Thirty Years,

THAN

By an Union of Sentiment,

ON

THE GREAT TRUTHS,

WHICH THIS VOLUME IS DESIGNED TO ILLUSTRATE AND ENFORCE,

THE FOLLOWING SERMONS

ARE

AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED

BY

THE AUTHOR.

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SERMON I.

THE CIRCUMCISION OF THE HEART.

ROMANS, ii. 28, 29.

For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

THE rite of circumcision was one of the sacraments of the Jewish church. It was appointed by God as the ceremony of admission into that religion. No one was allowed to partake of its ordinances and privileges, till he had first submitted to this rite; and indeed the severest threatenings were denounced on all who should refuse to comply with it. When our Saviour therefore came into the world, being born under the (Jewish) law, he submitted to this divinely-appointed ordinance; because in every thing it became Him "to fulfil all righteous-

ness," and in every respect to act as men, whose nature He had assumed, were required to act.

With respect to the design and object of the sacrament of circumcision, St. Paul tells us in the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, that it was both a *sign* and a *seal.* It was a *sign* to represent and teach; a *seal* to ratify and confirm. What it *ratified* and *confirmed* was the covenant of grace. It was a "seal of the righteousness of faith." It conveyed and secured to those, who rightly received it, and complied with the purpose of the institution, a personal interest in all the spiritual promises contained in the covenant made by God with Abraham; the chief of which were pardon of sin, peace with God, and a title to eternal life, through the merits and mediation of the promised and expected Saviour. — What this ordinance *represented* and *taught,* was the corruption of our nature and the necessity of that inward mortification of sin, and of that renewal of our heart to holiness, which is so indispensable a requisite in true religion; and which St. Paul calls, "the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh."* Without this inward circumcision of the heart, the outward circumcision of the body was of no use. Nor did this

* Col. ii. 4.

sacrament really seal the spiritual promises to any but to those, who were thus made partakers of the spiritual change, which was signified by it. This is the truth which St. Paul expressly asserts in the text, and he had great reason for asserting it. For the Jews were prone to rest in the outward ceremony, while they utterly neglected the inward grace, and to suppose that they were interested in the privileges of the covenant merely because they bore about them the external badge of it. This was a necessary consequence of the depravity of our nature, which always leads men to substitute the *form* of religion for the *power* of it, and to prefer *ceremonial* services to *spiritual* duties. It was the boast of the Jews that they were the Children of Abraham, the Heirs of the promises, the Temple of the Lord: while at the same time they were utterly destitute of that faith and holiness, which such a profession implied. They trusted that because they were circumcised, they were the favourites of Heaven; while at the same time they were altogether strangers to that disposition of heart, to which alone the promises were given, and the favour of heaven was limited. To correct these mistaken notions, and to lead his countrymen to a juster and more spiritual view of the subject, the Apostle here declares that "He is not a Jew, which

is one outwardly; neither is that Circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly, and Circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."

But the Jews are not the only persons to whom the truth contained in this passage applies. It applies to Christians also. The place which circumcision occupied in the Jewish church, baptism now occupies in the Christian. It is the sacrament which Christ has appointed for admission into his church: and, like the Jewish sacrament, for the same purpose, is both a *seal* and a *sign*. It is a *seal* of the promises of the Christian covenant. It is a *sign* of that inward and spiritual work in the heart, which alone will qualify us for partaking these promises. This work is well expressed in the words of our Church-Catechism to be "a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness." In other words, it is that inward mortification of sin, and that renewal of the heart to holiness, the necessity of which was signified by the rite of circumcision. We may see this point more fully stated at the end of the baptismal service of our Church, when in the concluding admonition having bidden us to "remember, that baptism does *represent* unto us our profession," she goes on more

expressly to state the meaning of that profession, namely, that we should "follow the example of our Saviour Christ, and be made like unto Him; that as He died and rose again for us, so should we who are baptized, die from sin, and rise again unto righteousness, continually mortifying all our evil and corrupt affections, and daily proceeding in all virtue and godliness of living." — This is the thing *signified* in baptism; and to those only who have it, does this sacrament really become a *seal.* It ratifies and confirms the Christian promises to all those who have put off the old man, and have put on the new man; of which change and state of heart the great constituent parts are faith and repentance. Such persons, according to the language of the Old Testament, are "circumcised in heart;" according to that of the New, are "baptized with the Holy Ghost*:" the blessed Spirit of God being the sole Author of this glorious work in the soul.

But, as was the case in the Jewish church, so it still is in the Christian. Persons are still prone to trust in the outward form, and to neglect the inward grace; to pride themselves on the sign, while they forget and overlook the thing signified. What is the ground on which many are placing their hopes of salvation, but this, — that they are

* Deut. xxx. 6. Luke, iii. 16.

CHRISTIANS; that they have been *baptized;* and by this sacrament have been admitted into the Christian church? Being thus made partakers of the *outward seal* of the covenant, they doubt not of their title to the *spiritual privileges* of it; and are not well pleased with those who would question their right to the comforts and promises of the Gospel. To all such persons, then, the text may be profitably addressed. It may be useful to them to be reminded, that with a very slight alteration it opposes their notions as directly as it did those of the Jews. "For he is not a *Christian,* which is one outwardly; neither is that *Baptism,* which is outward in the flesh: but he is a *Christian,* which is one inwardly; and *Baptism* is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."

The propriety of this application of the text is surely so obvious as to require no proofs or arguments in its support. At the same time I will offer a few considerations, which, with the Divine blessing, may help to explain the truths contained in it, and to fix them more deeply in the heart.

Let us then consider what, so far as man is concerned, is the great design and end of Christianity. It is the happiness of mankind. To make men happy is the grand object which the Christian religion proposes to ac-

complish. But to the accomplishment of this object two things are necessary. First, men must be reconciled to God, and brought into a state of peace and favour with Him. Secondly, they must be made fit in heart and dispositions for the enjoyment of heavenly happiness. The necessity of these two things arises from the present fallen state of human nature. Sin has made a breach between man and God. Before, then, man can be happy, this breach must be healed. Man also loves sin, and naturally has no taste or relish for holy pursuits and spiritual pleasures. Here, then, a great change also must be wrought in him, before he can enter Heaven, and share its happiness. Now Christianity proposes a remedy for both these evils. It offers to reconcile us to God, and to change and make new our heart and nature. Who then is the true Christian, but he who uses and applies this remedy, and who, by using it, *is* reconciled to God, and *is* made a new creature? Do we not see that, so long as men are at variance with God, and love and practise what is displeasing to Him, let them be called by whatsoever name, and bear whatsoever outward marks and badges of Christianity, they cannot be *real* Christians? Though with Simon Magus they may have been baptized, yet, with that miserable man, they will still have "no part nor lot in the

matter," so long as their "heart is not right in the sight of God." While this is the case, their baptism, their profession, their Christian name will profit them nothing. They are "yet in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." *

But let us go further into detail. Let us consider with more attention the particulars of that remedy which the Gospel proposes to mankind. We shall then distinctly see, how little any outward thing can give to any one an interest in the promises and privileges of Christianity. The remedy provided in the Gospel, like the evil which it undertakes to cure, is two-fold.

1. The Gospel opens a way for our being reconciled to God. It represents to us the blood of Jesus Christ as the means of effecting this reconciliation. By his blood He made an acceptable sacrifice for our sins. By his one offering of himself on the cross He satisfied the Divine justice, and so took out of the way that obstacle, which had prevented God from showing mercy to man. Thus it is said, that "we who sometimes were afar off, are brought nigh by the blood of Jesus:" and that "we who were enemies, are reconciled to God by the death of his Son." Thus Christ is said to be "our Peace," who hath "redeemed us to God by his

* Acts, viii. 21. 23.

blood;" and "was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." — This is the remedy provided.

But how is it to be used and applied? It is to be received with humble faith, and relied upon with a believing hope. Christ is "set forth as a propitiation through *faith*, in his blood." And his "Righteousness is unto all and upon all them that *believe*." We are expressly told that it is "*faith* which justifies;" and that "whoever *believeth* shall obtain remission of sins." But what then is this faith? Is it merely a fancy in the brain; a notion in the head; a persuasion in the mind; an assent of the understanding? No. It is a grace, a principle in the *heart*, deeply fixed and abiding there. It is "with the *heart* that man believeth unto righteousness."

The persons who really believe in Christ are those, who, feeling their guilt and misery as sinners, hear with joy of the atonement which Christ has made for sin on the cross, and with the heart put their whole trust for pardon and acceptance in his merits, mercies, and promises. These persons *are* reconciled to God. In the use of the remedy provided, their deadly wound is healed. They have peace with God through Jesus Christ: for their faith in Christ uniting them to Him, secures to them a per-

sonal interest in every thing which He has done and purchased for sinners. See, then, the folly and vanity of relying on any outward distinctions, on any name, any ceremony, or any rite. For none of these can do the office of faith. None of these can unite us to Christ, or reconcile us to God. Baptism is, indeed, the *seal* of the righteousness of faith. But it cannot supply the place of faith. It confirms to the *true believer* the promises of God in Christ: but it cannot give any interest in these promises to him *who believes not.* What then can baptism do without faith towards making our peace with God? It can do nothing. Our Church has expressly told us, that one of the requisites in those who come to be baptized, is "Faith, whereby they receive the promises of God." Beware, then, how you trust in this seal of the covenant, and undervalue and neglect that precious Faith, without which it is impossible that you can be saved, without which you must continue separated from Christ, and, consequently, at enmity with the blessed God for ever and ever.

2. The Gospel opens a way for our being made holy and fit for Heaven. This object it effects through the influence and agency of the Holy Spirit, who, as the Catechism again teaches us, "sanctifies all the elect

people of God." That Faith, indeed, of which we have been speaking, and which is in fact the seed of all holiness in the heart, is itself the gift and the operation of the Holy Ghost. But He does not merely sow the seed. He brings also the fruit to perfection. Having convinced the soul of sin, and led it to a simple trust on Jesus Christ for pardon, He goes on to purify and change it. Having wrought in it that "Repentance whereby we forsake sin," He goes on to deliver it more and more from the power of corruption, and to fill it with the fruits of righteousness. To this end He puts into the heart good thoughts and holy desires; stirs up in it devout affections and pious resolutions; teaches and enables it to resist the devil, to renounce the world, to withstand temptation, to crucify the flesh; and in the mean time cheers and strengthens it by Divine consolations and heavenly supports. Thus is the work of sanctification advanced. The grace of the Holy Spirit is the remedy provided for the cure of our natural corruption, and for bringing the soul into that state of spiritual health and soundness, which forms its fitness for the enjoyment of heavenly happiness.

But how is *this* remedy to be applied and used? By yielding the heart to the blessed influences of the Holy Spirit; by

seeking his help in diligent and earnest prayer; by giving ourselves up to his guidance and direction, obeying his godly motions, and complying with the suggestions which He puts into our hearts; by using the grace which He gives to us in struggling against the devil, the world, and the flesh, and thus *in His strength* getting victory over our corruptions, and cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit. See then, again, the folly and vanity of trusting to any *outward* distinction. Nothing but a *real inward* change of heart, a work of grace on the soul, producing in us spiritual affections and a holy life, can make us fit for Heaven. Baptism is, indeed, the sign of this inward change; but it cannot supply the place of it. The washing with water *represents* the washing by the Holy Ghost; but it is not the same thing. Far, then, from trusting only to the sign, seek after the thing signified. Seek after that renewal and sanctification of the heart, which alone will form your meetness for Heaven. Learn, from the statement here given, the nature of true religion. It is an *inward* thing. It is a compound of faith and holiness; the work and inspiration of Divine Grace. Faith is the seed, the root, the principle. Holiness is the branch, the fruit, the blessed effects produced by

it. This is true Christianity. It is fixed in the heart, and works and operates in the life. It leads those, who partake of its blessed influence, to be pious and devout; to be meek, humble, and patient; to deny themselves; to take up their cross daily; to overcome the world, and to have their conversation in Heaven. Now of such Christianity there is one particular stated in the text, which we shall do well to notice. "Its praise is not of men, but of God." True religion, such as it has been here described, has never been a favourite with the world. Men, in their natural state, have never liked, approved, or commended it. How, indeed, is it possible that they should? For it opposes them at every step; it crosses them at every turn. It condemns their views, their principles, and their practices. When set before them in description, or presented to their eyes in the holy lives of its professors, they cannot but see and feel how totally it differs from *that* which they call Religion, and which, consisting in forms, notions, and ordinances, allows them to indulge the flesh, to walk after the course of this world, and to serve Mammon more than God. True Religion, therefore, has not, and cannot have *their* praise. In fact they hate it, and show their hatred by speaking evil of it. They hold it up as the object of scorn and ridicule.

They revile its doctrines, they slander its professors. This is the treatment with which, in a greater or a less degree, real godliness has always met from an ungodly world, and with which, in a greater or a less degree, it must always meet from the world, so long as the world continues to be ungodly, and to lie in wickedness.

Ye, then, who may be suffering from the enmity of the world for conscience-sake; ye who may be reviled and despised, because ye are faithfully serving the Lord Christ, be not surprised, "as though some strange thing had happened unto you;" for "the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren, which are in the world." Bear in mind, that if you are of the true circumcision, who, as St. Paul describes them, "worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh*;" you may, indeed, have no praise of men, but you have something which infinitely surpasses all *their* praise, — the praise of *God*. God *now* sees and approves you, and *hereafter* will appear in your favour. He may suffer you for a season to endure reproach; but in due time He will roll it all away, and will cause your righteousness to shine forth as the sun. Let it be now your care to persevere unto the end, and to approve your heart before God.

* Philip. iii. 3.

Preferring His praise to that of men, seeking the honour which cometh from Him only, walk humbly and uprightly in His sight. Seek to grow in faith and in holiness. Aim to be more simply dependent on the merits and promises of Jesus Christ. Look more steadfastly to His fulness for a supply of all your wants. Be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man. Confess Him with your lips and in your lives before the world. And in that day when He shall come in glory to make up His jewels, "to be glorified in His saints, and admired in all them that believe," He will confess you before His holy angels, and before His Father, which is in Heaven.

But, on the other hand, *what* in that day will be the state of those who shall be found guilty of having despised and rejected the remedy provided for them in the Gospel; of those, who, still remaining uncircumcised in heart, have always resisted the Holy Ghost, and notwithstanding their pretensions and privileges, as Children of the Kingdom *now*, shall *then* be found to have neither lot nor portion among the true Israel of God;—of those who have been Christians in nothing but in name; who, partaking of the outward sign of the covenant, have been destitute of the inward grace; who have been baptized with water, but not baptized with the Holy

Ghost; who have eaten of the sacramental bread, but have not fed on Christ in their hearts by faith with thanksgiving; — of those, who, consulting only their own corrupt and carnal inclinations, have framed to themselves a religion suited to their own taste, and pride, and prejudices, and have called it Christianity; a religion which consists in the shadow without the substance, in the body without the spirit, in the form without the power of godliness; which substitutes ceremonial observances, and outward distinctions, in the place of vital faith, and practical godliness; a religion which allows its followers to be selfish, and worldly, and covetous; to be lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God; to serve Belial in conjunction with Christ; to honour the creature more than the Creator; to fear man rather than God?—What, I ask, in that day, will be the state of these nominal, external, unsanctified Christians? Where will be their meetness for standing before Christ? Will He own *them* for his people? Will He see in *them* the travail of his soul and be satisfied? Will He recognise in *them* his image, his likeness? Will He say to *them*, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for *you?*" My brethren, need I to answer these questions? Have you not already answered them yourselves? Does

not your own reason tell you that such persons are not *true* Christians;—that whatever they may now think, or say, however they may now boast of their privileges, and may plume themselves upon their fancied distinctions, they will then be treated as workers of iniquity, as enemies of Christ, as despisers of the covenant of Grace; and will be cast into outer darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth?

And while reason tells you these things, what does *conscience* say? Does it convict *you* of being in the state of which I speak? Does it secretly say to any one here present, "Thou art the man:" 'Thou art the person, who hast the form of godliness, but 'art without the power of it; who professest 'to know God, but in works deniest Him; 'who callest thyself a Christian, but hast no 'real interest in Christ; who trustest in thy 'privileges, but art an enemy to all serious 'godliness?' If there be one, whose conscience speaks thus to him, let me earnestly say to him, Consider your ways. Consider them before it is too late; while yet there is time for repentance; while yet a door of mercy is open. Renounce your wisdom. Mortify your pride. Come as a little child to Christ, and pray to be baptized with the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Pray that you may become a new creature, a worshipper of

God in spirit and in truth. Pray that his kingdom may be set up in your heart; and that, being enlightened, converted, and sanctified by his Spirit, you may walk with Him in newness of life.

Do you slight this counsel? Are you offended with this friendly admonition? Wise in your own conceits, are you too proud to be taught? Puffed up with fleshly wisdom, will you still boast of your privileges, and say, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we?" Is this the case? Then will I conclude with solemnly addressing you in the words of the prophet, "Lo, thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and what wisdom is in thee."*

* Jeremiah, viii. 9.

SERMON II.

NATURE AND NECESSITY OF REGENERATION.

JOHN, iii. 7.

Marvel not, that I said unto Thee, Ye must be born again.

THE truth contained in these words is one of the most weighty in Scripture: one which concerns us all, and requires the deepest attention. May God dispose our hearts to attend to it with seriousness, humility, and impartiality! The way in which we receive the doctrine of the *New Birth* is one of the clearest tests of the pride, or the humility of our heart; of its teachable, or unteachable, of its prejudiced, or unprejudiced state. For the better understanding of the subject, let us shortly review the circumstances which stand connected with the text.

Nicodemus, a Pharisee, and ruler of the Jews, a person of the strictest sect, and highest authority among them, having heard of the miracles which Jesus wrought, and

being convinced that He could work them only through the power of God, was desirous of being acquainted with the doctrines which He taught. He accordingly came to Him, and from fear either of discovery or of interruption, came to Him by night. Addressing Him in terms of great respect, he professed his conviction that He was a teacher come from God: "for no man," added he, "can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." Jesus, without any delay, proceeded to put his profession to the test. He proceeded to try, whether he was so convinced of His divine mission, as implicitly to receive the doctrines which He taught, however opposed they might be to human prejudice and human pride. In a most solemn and decisive manner, He said to Nicodemus, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." This declaration astonished the Pharisee, who, taking the new birth of which our Lord spoke in a literal sense, asked, with surprise, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" But the birth to which Christ referred, as He went on to show, was not a literal, but a spiritual birth. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he

cannot enter the kingdom of God." The birth which He meant was a birth, of which the application of water was the figurative emblem or sign, but which was really to be effected by the agency of the Spirit of God. It was, in short, an inward and a spiritual change, a change of heart and nature, by the influence of the Holy Spirit; the reason and necessity for which our Lord immediately adduces, "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit, is spirit."—This statement so clearly pointed out the nature and necessity of the new birth, to which he alluded, that He directly adds in the text, "Marvel not, that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." As if He had said, 'Be not surprised at my 'assertion. That new birth, which, as a 'teacher sent from God, I declare to be so 'indispensably necessary to salvation, that 'without it no man can see or enter the 'kingdom of God, contains nothing in it-'self impossible; nothing contradictory; 'nothing, in fact, but what is perfectly 'agreeable to reason, to Scripture, and to 'experience; nothing but what you, as a 'master in Israel, might easily have known, 'and ought to understand.' In discoursing further on the text thus explained, I shall enter more fully,

I. On the Doctrine contained in it.

II. On the Agreement of this Doctrine with Scripture, Reason, and Facts.

I. The Doctrine contained in the text is comprehended in these words, "Ye must be born again."

It has been already observed, that the expression of being "born again," or of undergoing a "new birth," is not to be taken in a literal sense. The meaning is figurative; and the change intended by it is a spiritual change, of which the Spirit of God is the efficient author and cause. At the same time, we cannot but suppose that the Holy Ghost, in making choice of this figurative language to convey His meaning, has selected that which was best adapted to His purpose, and consequently that though the birth spoken of is not a literal birth, yet the change figured by it, in some particular respects, resembles a "new birth;" and the person so spiritually changed, may, with a peculiar propriety, be said to have been "born again." In explaining the nature of this change, we should not altogether lose sight of the image by which it is represented; nor, from the fear of overstraining the figurative language, abstain from a proper and legitimate use of it.

Birth implies previous life, though the beginning of it may have been small, and imperceptible; while the person, who is born,

enters on a new stage and scene of action, suited to the life which he has received, to the faculties bestowed on him, and to the place, and the station, which he is designed to fill. This idea will serve to illustrate and explain the nature of that change of which we are speaking.

The new, or spiritual birth, pre-supposes the existence of a new, or spiritual life. He who is born of the Spirit has received of the Spirit a new principle of life; though at what time, or in what manner, this principle may have been communicated to the soul, we may be utterly ignorant. "The wind," says our Lord, in the verse following the text, "the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." The *beginning* of spiritual life—*how* or *when* the Spirit may have quickened the soul—we pretend not to define; but *this* we assert, that every one who is born of the Spirit has been quickened by the Spirit; and is partaker of a spiritual life (for "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit"); and now, entering on a new stage and scene of action, he gives evident proof of the spiritual change which has taken place within. Like the new-born babe, he now seeks for spiritual sustenance, "even the sincere milk of the

word, that he may grow thereby." His eyes are now opened to discern spiritual objects; his ears to listen to spiritual truths; his lips to utter spiritual language. He is no longer carnally-minded, but spiritually-minded: no longer walks in the flesh, but in the spirit. His desires are now spiritual. They are directed to those objects which the Spirit has revealed, and teaches us to value. His hopes and fears are spiritual. Instead of being a formal, he is become a spiritual worshipper of God. He worships Him in spirit, and in truth. Instead of being, as he once was, blind and ignorant, in respect to those things which are really good, and averse from following them, he is now spiritually enlightened to discern the true riches, and eager, and earnest, and constant, in pursuing them. In a word, how great a change is wrought! Sin, once the delight and idol of the soul, is hated and cast out. Holiness is loved and followed. Christ, who before was disregarded, is esteemed, and accounted precious. The sinner, once dead in trespasses and sins, now lives to God; fears, serves, and honours Him; delights in His law; rejoices in His Gospel; and reveres Him, as a kind and loving Father.—This is the man "who is born again." This is the change produced by the "new birth."

But the text not only illustrates the Na-

ture of this change, it declares also the necessity for it. "Ye *must* be born again." Christ does not say, 'ye *may* be born again,' or 'ye *ought* to be born again;' or 'it would be better, and happier for you'—but "*Ye must.*"—"I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." And when had He said thus to Nicodemus? When He had just told him, "that except a man be born again of water and of the Spirit, he cannot see, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." This spiritual change is indispensably necessary to salvation; so necessary, that there can be no salvation without it. If a man would see, would enter into the kingdom of God, he *must* be born again. And what are we to understand by the expression of "the kingdom of God?" Not merely His kingdom in heaven, but His kingdom also on earth. In heaven God's kingdom will be perfected in glory, security, and felicity. But it is begun on earth. It is set up, and established in this world; and all, who will share the blessings of it hereafter, must become subjects of it here. Here they must enter into it: here they must acquire a taste for its peculiar pleasures and duties. But these pleasures, and these duties, like the kingdom to which they belong, are of a spiritual nature. The kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom. Its pleasures are spiri-

tual. Its duties are spiritual. None, therefore, but those who are spiritually alive, born of the Spirit, *can* belong to this kingdom. None others can enter into it, and become subjects of it: for none others, in fact, can *see* it: none others can discern its beauty, excellence, and value: none others can relish the pleasures belonging to it, nor take any delight in the duties which it prescribes. "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh." Water cannot rise higher than the spring from which it flows. Man, "in the flesh," in his natural, unrenewed state, "receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Thus, as the Apostle says, "they that are in the flesh, cannot please God." * They cannot become his subjects; they cannot enter into, nor even see his kingdom. Hence results the Necessity of this "New Birth," this spiritual change. Hence it is, that if ye would be saved, if ye would now live unto God, and hereafter live with Him, "ye *must* be born again."

Such is the Doctrine contained in the text. Let us next consider,

II. Its Agreement with Scripture, Reason, and Facts. When our Lord in this passage insisted on the *Necessity* of the New

* Romans, viii. 8.

Birth, and intimated the *Nature* of the change of which he spoke, Nicodemus expressed his astonishment at the doctrine. But how did Christ address him in the text? "*Marvel not*, that I said unto thee, ye must be born again." And on the Pharisees afterwards asking, "How can these things be?" Jesus replied, "Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?" Nicodemus spake of it as a Doctrine new, strange, and irrational. But Christ represented it in a very different light. He spake of it throughout his discourse, as a Doctrine which had nothing mysterious or wonderful in it; and which Nicodemus ought to have known. In fact, it is a Doctrine, which the Scriptures plainly teach; which Reason fully approves; and which Facts strikingly confirm. Let us attend to these three points in order.

The Doctrine in the text is a doctrine which the Scriptures plainly teach; the writings of the Old Testament, as well as those of the New: for in this respect there is no difference between them. They both teach the same doctrines. The only difference is, that the New Testament generally inculcates with clearness and decision those truths, which the Old Testament reveals in a manner obscure and shadowy, and oftentimes by inference, rather than by direct

and open statement. But on the point before us, the writings of the Old Testament are sufficiently plain, and explicit; for otherwise Nicodemus could not have been expected to know the Doctrine in question. In fact, when we are told in the first chapter of Genesis, that man was originally created in the image, and after the likeness of God, that is, in righteousness and true holiness; and when, in the fourth chapter, we read that Adam, after the fall, begat a son in *his own* image, after *his own* likeness; nothing can be plainer, than that a great spiritual change, equivalent to a new birth, is necessary in order to fit mankind for that happiness, and for those services, for which he was originally designed. Again, when we read such declarations as the following: "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." — "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." — "How abominable and filthy is man, who drinketh iniquity like water!" — "God looked from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God. Every one of them is gone back; they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no not one."* — I say, when

* Genesis, viii. 21. Jerem. xvii. 9. Job, xv. 16. Psalm liii. 2, 3.

we read such declarations as these, and compare them with the descriptions given of true religion, which represent it as a spiritual service; as truth in the inward parts; as consisting in the fear and love of God, in a desire of pleasing him, in a rejoicing in the light of his countenance; what can be more evident, than that the heart of man must be spiritually renewed, before it can be the seat of true religion? What are the commands of the Old Testament, "Circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked." — "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes;" that is inwardly in the heart. "Cast away from you all your transgressions, and make you a new heart, and a new spirit; for why will ye die?"* Surely the doctrine contained in these commands, differs but little from that contained in the text, "Ye must be born again." — Look next at the promises in reference to these commands. "The Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed after thee, to love the Lord thy God, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live." — And again, "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you; and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A

* Deut. x. 16. Isaiah, i. 16. Ezek. xviii. 31.

new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them." * Surely the change promised to be wrought in these passages is nothing less than a new birth by the Spirit of God. Why, then, should Nicodemus have *marvelled* at the doctrine in the text? Why should he have said, "How can these things be?" He would not have so marvelled, and so said, had he searched and known the Scriptures. Why then should any of us be surprised at this doctrine? Why should we marvel at the thought of being born again? Why should we question the Nature, or the Necessity of this change? Let us search the Scriptures, and attend to them, and we shall see no cause for wonder, or for doubt. In addition to the writings of the Old Testament *we* have those of the New: we have the decisive testimony of Christ himself in this discourse with Nicodemus; we have numberless passages in the Gospels and the Epistles bearing on the same point. Take the following as a specimen. "As many as received Him, to them gave He power

* Deut. xxx. 6. Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27.

to become the Sons of God; even to them that believe on his name; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." — "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." — "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God." — And to mention only one more passage. — "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away: behold, all things are become new." *

I told you, my brethren, at the beginning of my discourse, that the statement of this doctrine would be a trial of your heart, of its humbled or unhumbled state; of its disposition to be taught of God, or to set up its own vain notions in opposition to His truths. For it is a doctrine which is directly levelled at the pride of our hearts, and calculated to excite our prejudices and to provoke our reasonings against it. But, at the same time, it is a doctrine which reason, rightly exercised, cannot but approve. Man is evidently far gone from original righteousness. He is naturally incapable of rendering to God spiritual service. "Being born of the flesh, he is flesh." He is utterly indisposed to love and obey God. He clearly loves sin, and folly, and the world, and self. These are the

* John, i. 12, 13. Ephes. ii.1. 1 John, v. 1. 2 Cor. v. 17.

idols whom he serves and honours. Do we not all know, and see, and feel this to be the case? Are we not sensible that we are not now born in that moral likeness, in that spiritual image of God, in which man was at first created? What then can be more *reasonable*, than that a religion which professes to recover us from the consequences and evils of sin, and to bring us back to the favour and presence of God, should make provision for recovering us to His image and likeness; and should insist upon such a recovery as an indispensable requisite to our salvation? Surely, in this view, "ye must be born again," is a sentiment the most agreeable to reason, the most plain and level to our understanding. And when God, who first created man, reserves to Himself the power of this new creation; when he who first said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness," should now claim the prerogative of restoring him to that image, and likeness: when the Spirit of God, who is the author and giver of all life, should, at his will, quicken the spiritually dead, and impart to them a new principle of life. — Is there any thing, in all this dispensation, to which reason, *rightly exercised*, can object? No, she approves it; she sees in it the power, and the wisdom of God. She consents to it as good. She acquiesces in it as right. She

rejoices in it as a dispensation best adapted to the wants of man, and to the glory of God.

And now I might next appeal to the evidence of *Facts;* and show how *they* confirm the doctrine as it has been explained. But the time will not admit of my entering far into this subject; I will, therefore, simply state the question thus. Look at those persons in your own immediate neighbourhood, or among the circle of your acquaintance, whom, in your conscience, you believe to be the most faithful servants, the most spiritual worshippers of God, living the most decidedly under the influence of a religious principle, and producing the most evident fruits of righteousness, and true holiness. Look, I say, at such persons. Apply to them. Refer the matter to their decision. Ask them what they think of the doctrine in the text? Do they believe in the Necessity of a new and spiritual birth? Do they believe that a man must be born again of the Spirit, in the way that has been stated, before he can serve God acceptably, and can offer up spiritual sacrifices? Put these enquiries to them, and I will show you what their answer will be. They will tell you that they are themselves living witnesses to the truth of this doctrine; that they know by *experience* the nature and the necessity of a new,

birth unto righteousness; that till they were quickened by the holy Spirit of God, they were themselves dead in sin, ignorant of God, and blind to spiritual things. They will tell you that whatever spiritual light, or life, they now have; whatever disposition to fear and love God; whatever desire after Jesus Christ, and his salvation; whatever power to obey, serve, and honour Him — that for all these things they are indebted solely to the regenerating influences of the Spirit, by whom they "have been begotten again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away."

And now, my brethren, what will *you* say to these things? I have explained to you the nature of that spiritual change, which is intended by the expression of being "born again." I have pointed out to you the necessity for it. I have shown you that this is the doctrine of Scripture; that it is agreeable to Reason; that it is confirmed by Facts and Experience. And now what do *you* say to these things? Are you yourselves the subjects of this change? Have you already experienced it? Are you born of the Spirit? These are questions of very serious moment, and which you are required very seriously to answer to your own hearts

and consciences, for there is no alternative in this matter. There is no *choice* left to you: "ye *must* be born again." Till this be the case with you, you cannot *enter* into, you cannot *see* the kingdom of God. You may have some *notion* of what true religion should be; but you have no *experience* of what it really is. You may have *heard* of Jesus Christ, but you have not *so seen* Him, as to believe on Him. You may have the body, the form of godliness; but you are destitute of its spirit, its power. You may belong to the outward, visible church of God, but you have as yet nothing to do with his inward and invisible kingdom. — Perhaps you will say, 'We have been bap-'tized unto Christ, we have been washed in 'the laver of regeneration, and were we 'not at that time, and in that ordinance, 'born again?' My brethren, you may, indeed, have been partakers of this ordinance, and by it may have been admitted into the external fellowship of Christ's religion. You may have been baptized with water; but have you also been baptized with the Holy Ghost? The outward washing with water is but the sign and emblem of that inward washing by the Spirit, of that "death unto sin," and that "new birth unto righteousness," which is real regeneration. Rest not then in the outward ordinance, nor deceive yourselves with the hope that you are thus

"born again." Think not, because you may have been baptized with water, that *therefore* you are *necessarily* baptized with the Holy Ghost. You might as reasonably urge that every Israelite who was circumcised in the flesh, was also necessarily circumcised in heart. Correct so erroneous an opinion. Give no credit, no countenance to so false and unscriptural a position.—If, indeed, you will persist in retaining this notion, if you will still maintain that at baptism you received the seed of spiritual life: what, I would ask, has been the product? Has the seed sprung up, and grown, and budded, and blossomed, and brought much, or even any fruit to perfection? If it has, well. If you are now a spiritual worshipper of God, and are living a spiritual life by faith in His Son, you may justly conclude that you have been born of the Spirit, whether at baptism, or at some other period. But if you are still carnally-minded, and are living a carnal life, you may be sure, that whenever you may have been baptized with water, you are still a stranger to the baptism of the Holy Ghost; you are still unrenewed, uncircumcised in heart, and with Nicodemus *must* be born again.—And will you quietly continue in this state of death and sin? Will you boast of being a Christian, while you have nothing belonging to one but the name? "Awake, thou that sleepest, and

arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." O that, while I am speaking, the Spirit, the blessed Author of the glorious change, who goeth where He listeth, and quickeneth whom He will, would quicken some souls among us, and by his powerful energies would call forth into life some hearts, hitherto lying dead in trespasses and sins! One of the first fruits and marks of such a work would be a secret *conviction* of the truth, and the reality of this change of which we speak; a conviction producing an inward *desire* to partake of it. My brethren, have any of you this conviction? Do you find this desire in you? Welcome, O welcome, the beginnings of grace in your soul. Quench not the sacred light. It may be the dawn of that day which will never end; the forerunner of that sun which will never go down. Strive to impress and increase this conviction on your heart. Turn your desire into prayer. Pray "that you may be born again;" that you may experience in your own soul the power of renewing grace; that you may know what it is to have the heart quickened, enlightened, regenerated by the Spirit of God. Persevere in such prayers. Doubt not of their being heard and answered. Ask all in the name of Jesus Christ; and rely upon that most comfortable promise, "God will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him."

SERMON III.

ADOPTION THE FRUIT OF FAITH AND REGENERATION.

JOHN, i. 12, 13.

But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the Sons of God, even to them that believe on His Name: which were born, not of Blood, nor of the Will of the flesh, nor of the Will of man, but of God.

IT is the great and peculiar privilege of true Christians, that they "have received the adoption of sons," have been taken "into the household of God," and "have a name and a place in his family." Being made members of Christ, they are become the children of God. It is this privilege, of which St. John speaks in the text. He tells us of some, who had "power to become the Sons of God:" and he tells us also *whence* they had obtained this power; *by what means* they were become the Sons of

God. On this point, indeed, he enters very fully into particulars. So that in discoursing on this passage, I shall naturally be led to enlarge on the previous *Causes*, by which our adoption into the family of God under the Christian covenant is brought about and accomplished.

In speaking indeed of the *Causes* by which our adoption is accomplished, it must ever be remembered that this privilege, like every other blessing of redemption, springs solely from the spontaneous mercy and the rich loving kindness of the Lord. Admission into his family is exclusively the work and the gift of God. His grace is the first moving *Cause* of our adoption: and if we receive this adoption, it is solely because He freely bestows it on us. Such is the view exhibited in the text. Those who had the power to become the Sons of God are described as having *received* this power from Him. It is expressly said, that He "gave it to them." Once children of wrath, are they now children of grace? Once children of darkness, are they now children of light? Once children of disobedience, the slaves of sin and Satan, are they now the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty? *Whence* did they obtain this privilege? *How* was this glorious change in their state effected? Did they merit or purchase it for themselves? Did they pro-

cure it by their own wisdom, power, or goodness? No. God, "who is rich in mercy, of his great love wherewith He loved them, quickened them when dead in trespasses and sins;" "justified them freely by his grace;" and thus "translated them out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his dear Son."—But God in thus fulfilling the purposes of his love works by means. He ordains instruments for the accomplishing of his ends. He employs means for bringing sinners into his family. And these instruments, these means, which He has thus ordained and employs, may be considered as secondary and subservient *Causes* in effecting the great work of our adoption.—Such are the Causes, on which I purpose to enlarge; and which the text describes as two:

I. The one *immediate*, which is *Faith*: "as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the Sons of God, even to them that *believe* on His name."

II. The other *remote*, which is *Regeneration*: "who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of men, but of God."

My brethren, may the Spirit of God be with us in our meditations on this important and interesting subject!

I. In considering Faith, as the *immediate*

Cause of our adoption into the family of God, we may advert first,

To the particular Act or exercise of Faith here meant; and, secondly,

To the Way in which it tends to produce the effect ascribed to it.

First, Faith, in order to be of any avail in the work of our redemption, must be placed in the heart. This alone can be a saving faith: and this alone is the faith, of which we hear speak: not an historical, not a doctrinal, not a notional belief; but a living, a vital faith in the heart; for "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness." The object of faith is the word of God. Faith generally has respect to every thing which God has either revealed or promised. But the particular act of faith, to which our present attention is directed, has respect to Jesus Christ. He exclusively is the object of that faith, by which we receive the adoption of sons. "For we are all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ."* — And St. John tells us in the text, that the persons to whom Christ "gives power to become the Sons of God, are those who *believe* on his name." Now the *Name* of Christ signifies Christ himself; or rather Christ in the discharge of those offices, which on our account He has assumed: for His Names are descrip-

* Gal. iii. 26.

tive of His offices. He is "Emmanuel;" for "he is God with us." — He is the True Light; "for He lighteth every man that cometh into the world." He is "Jesus;" for "He shall save his people from their sins." He is "the Lamb of God;" for He "taketh away the sin of the world." He is "the Lord our righteousness;" for "in Him shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory." These are some of the *Names* of Christ: and to believe on his Name, is to believe on Him as discharging for us those offices, which these Names describe: to trust in Him as the Saviour, the Lamb of God, the Lord our righteousness. — But there is one expression in the text, which will convey a still clearer idea of that particular exercise of Faith, which we are now considering. The apostle says, "To as many as *received* Him, to them gave He power to become the Sons of God." Believing in Christ is here represented by *receiving* Him. This expression of *receiving* evidently implies the idea of a gift: and such is the view in which Christ is frequently exhibited in Scripture. He is spoken of as a gift. God gives to us his Son. He offers Him to us in all his offices, to enlighten, justify, and save us. To believe then on the Son is to receive this gift. It is humbly and thankfully to acquiesce in the

salvation provided; it is cordially to appropriate to ourselves the blessings held out to us: it is from the heart to take Jesus Christ as "of God made unto *us* wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." — This is that act and exercise of Faith, by which we become the children of God.

It must be obvious that this faith presupposes the existence of several important particulars. Before a person could have been induced thus to receive Christ, there must have been a *Conviction* of sin, and some measure of consequent alarm excited within him. He must have so seen and felt his guilt and danger as a sinner, as to have utterly renounced his own righteousness, and for ever to have given up the hope of saving himself by his own works. — There must have been a *Consciousness* of his own spiritual blindness and weakness wrought in his soul. He must have so felt his own ignorance, as to be willing to be taught from above: so experienced his own helplessness, as to be thankful for the promise of supernatural strength. — There must have been a *Distaste* for sin, and a strong wish to break off from it produced in his heart. He must have so groaned under the burden of a depraved and corrupted nature, as anxiously to have desired deliverance from

it. — There must have been a *Persuasion* wrought in his mind, of the sufficiency of Christ, of the certainty and suitableness of the salvation provided in Him: for without such a Persuasion how could the heart have been induced to accept His mediation, and to embrace His offers? In short, pride must have been humbled; self must have been dethroned; spiritual apprehensions of sin must have been acquired; spiritual views of Christ must have been obtained; before there could have been that cordial acquiescence in his salvation, that personal appropriation of Him to the soul in all his offices, which the act of *receiving* Him implies; and which, in fact, is that very exercise of Faith, by which our adoption into the family of God is accomplished. Let us advert,

Secondly, To the Way in which this Faith tends to produce the effect ascribed to it.

This receiving of Christ, this Act of believing on Him, of which we speak, is the consent of the soul to the covenant of grace. And no sooner does the soul yield this consent, than its union with Christ is accomplished. The act of Faith is virtually the act of union; for whenever the soul thus surrenders itself without reserve to Christ, He takes it into union with Himself. This union is variously represented in Scripture, and illustrated by many different comparisons.

At one time it is likened to the engrafting of a branch into the tree: at another, to the incorporation of a limb into the body. But there is no resemblance more frequently employed on this subject, than the marriage union; "This," says the apostle, speaking of the union which is effected by marriage, "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and his church."* Christ is the bridegroom of His church, the husband of His people: and all true believers are married unto Him; and thus by the strongest and tenderest of all ties, are united to Him. And it is from this union, thus effected, and accomplished by faith, that all their interests in the blessings of the Gospel spring. They are "accepted in the beloved," and stand "complete in Him." Having united them to Himself, He regards and treats them as such an union imports. He takes their debts upon Himself, and confers his riches on them. He washes them from their sins in his own blood, and clothes them in the robe of his own righteousness. Thus being pardoned through his sufferings, and justified through his obedience, they are accounted as dear children in Him, are admitted as one with Him into the family of God, and are invested with all the privileges which that high distinction involves. When

* Ephes. v. 32.

the prodigal returned to his father's home, not only did he meet with every token of forgiveness and reconciliation, but in every respect he was welcomed and treated as a son; a son, who had been "dead, but was alive again;" who had been "lost, but was found."

Thus Faith tends to produce the effect ascribed to it. By uniting the soul to Christ, it secures to it a name and a place among the children of God: and so may be justly regarded as the *immediate Cause* by which our adoption is accomplished. We consider,

II. The *remote Cause* of this effect, *Regeneration.* — St. John represents those who through faith have power to become the sons of God, not only as having believed on his name, but also as having been "born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." — That the birth which the apostle here imputes to them was not their natural and original birth, is evident from the manner in which he speaks of it. That birth *was* of blood, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man. But the birth of which the Apostle speaks was *not* of any of these, but "of God." Consequently it was another and a later birth; a second or a new birth; or, to make use of another term, a Regeneration. In discussing, then, the

subject before us, let us here also advert to two things; First,

To the Nature of this new birth; and, Secondly,

To the Way in which it tends to produce the effect ascribed to it.

The nature of this new birth will be most readily perceived from the Apostle's account of its author and its origin. We have already seen, that he tells whence it is not, and whence it is. — "It is *not* of blood." This new birth is not produced by natural generation, neither is it communicated by natural descent. No man inherits, or can inherit it from his natural parents. His relation to any particular family gives him no preference or title to it. — Neither is it of "the will of the flesh." This regeneration is not the consequence of any man's own natural choice, nor of any previous disposition or desire for it. The flesh, which is the corrupt natural state, has no inclination for being born again, nor, indeed, has any knowledge or conception of the change denoted by this expression. — *Neither* is it of "the will of man." No man can impart this new birth to another. However desirous, however anxious he may be that any particular individual should partake of it, he is utterly unable to secure the accomplishment of his wish. So far from being competent to *will*,

he is not even able to *conjecture*, to what persons this blessing shall be ultimately dispensed. But if Regeneration be not "of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man," whence is it? It is "of God." God is the sole Author of the new birth. He dispenses it according to his sovereign will, and accomplishes it by the efficacy of his almighty power. The great agent in accomplishing it is the Spirit, who by His immediate operation on the soul produces this important change: for we are "born again of the Spirit." And from this account, then, of the *origin* of Regeneration we may more readily perceive its *nature*. It is a supernatural, a divine, a spiritual birth. It is the communication of a supernatural principle; the infusion of a divine nature; the insertion of a spiritual life. "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit." The man who is thus "born of God" is a "new creature." He has received into his heart a heavenly seed, which, partaking of the nature of its high original, has a tendency to produce all holy and heavenly affections in the soul, to repair its spiritual decays, and to renew it to that image and likeness of God, which it first lost by sin. This is Regeneration. Let us advert, then, Secondly,

To the way in which it tends to produce the effect ascribed to it. This way is ob-

vious. For that very Faith by which we receive the adoption of sons, is itself the consequence and the fruit of regenerating grace. No man will truly believe on the name of the Son of God, but he who is a partaker of that new and heavenly nature which this new birth imparts. St. John expressly says, that "whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God."* Unless there is first this spiritual birth, there can be no true and saving faith. For how can a man with the heart believe unto righteousness, while the heart is still in an unrenewed and a carnal state? In this state the heart is incapable of believing. It neither feels, nor apprehends, its own real dangers and wants. It has no spiritual sight of Christ. It perceives not His excellency. It desires not His favour. How, then, can it believe on Him? In support of this reasoning, let us call to mind those several important particulars, the previous existence of which, as we have seen, is essential to the production of a true and living Faith; namely, that conviction of guilt and fear of its awful consequences: that consciousness of blindness and weakness: that willingness to be taught and strengthened from above: that distaste for sin, and desire of deliverance from it: that persuasion of the sufficiency of

* 1 John, v. 1.

Christ, and of the suitableness of his salvation. Can these things exist in any, but in a regenerate mind: in a mind enlightened, humbled, influenced by the Spirit of God? No; it is impossible. No soul which is not born again of the Spirit, can have these spiritual convictions, feelings, fears, and desires. No soul, therefore, which is not born again of the Spirit, can have Faith.—Thus Regeneration tends to produce the effect ascribed to it. Adoption is the consequence of union with Christ. This union is accomplished by Faith; and Faith itself is the fruit of regenerating Grace. Those persons to whom, on receiving Christ, "He gave power to become the sons of God, were" first "born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God!" Their believing on his name was the result of their new birth: and thus their Regeneration by the Spirit of God was the Cause, however remote, of their adoption into His family.

Such is the doctrine unfolded in the text. On a review of it, what is the first feeling excited in the mind, but admiration at the wonderful provision made for our perishing souls; at the suitableness and the sufficiency of that provision. "O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" How "well ordered in all things

and sure" is that covenant of grace, wherein He has "abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence!" In bringing back sinners to his family, and in restoring to them a name and a place among his sons and daughters, He has taken effectual care that none shall be admitted to this glorious privilege who are not first made meet for the duties and enjoyments of it. He has so constituted the method of salvation, that none can receive the adoption of sons but those who are previously born again of His Spirit; and who, by this new birth, have been made partakers of that holy nature which both qualifies and disposes them for discharging the offices, and for sharing the consolations, of children. Those whom He adopts, He first regenerates: while one of the necessary effects of this Regeneration is to lead them sooner or later to that exercise of Faith in Jesus Christ, by which alone their adoption is brought about and completed. All that are adopted have been regenerated: all that are regenerated will be adopted. These great privileges of Christianity are inseparably united together; while Faith in Christ is that one connecting medium by which the union is at first effected, and afterwards preserved.

Here, then, is an important ground for self-examination and enquiry. Would we

know whether we have been regenerated by the Spirit of God, whether we have received the adoption of Sons; the point for consideration is this, Have we Faith in Jesus Christ? None can truly believe in Him, who are not born of God: while "to as many as receive Him, to them gives He power to become the Sons of God." So that Faith in Christ is at once an evidence of our Regeneration, as well as a proof of our adoption. If we have this Faith we are undoubtedly born of God, and as undoubtedly admitted into his family: we are regenerated and made His children by adoption and grace. Have we, then, this Faith in Jesus Christ? Do we believe in His name? Do we cordially receive Him as freely given to us of God in all his offices, as an unspeakable gift, precious in our eyes, and dear to our hearts? Let us again call to mind those several important particulars, of which this Faith already presupposes the existence; and see what experience we ourselves have of them.

1st. What do we know of conviction of sin? Has the Spirit of God wrought this gracious work in our souls? Has He opened our understanding to see, and our hearts to feel, our guilt and misery as sinners? Has he so discovered to us the sinfulness of our nature and conduct? Has He so impressed us with an apprehension of

the punishment which we have justly incurred, as to convince us of the necessity of fleeing from the wrath to come, and of seeking some better refuge than any which our own merits, or doings, or resolutions can provide? In a word, have we ever been brought seriously and earnestly to put to ourselves this most important question, What shall I do to be saved?

2d. Have we been made sensible of our own spiritual blindness and weakness; of our natural ignorance about spiritual things; and of our utter insufficiency of ourselves to think or to do any thing that is good? Have we felt our need of divine teaching? Under an humbling consciousness of the darkness and hardness of our minds, have we been willing to be enlightened with the wisdom which is from above; and, like little children, to be led into the knowledge and love of the truth? Have we felt our need of divine strength? Deeply experiencing our own inability to serve God with our spirit, and to offer to Him spiritual sacrifices, have we longed for supernatural help, have we desired to be strengthened with might from above in the inner man?

3d. Has the love of sin been broken in our hearts? Have we so seen the evil of our depraved nature, as to be dissatisfied with it? Have we so felt the burden of

sinful habits, as to have groaned under their weight? Have we been ashamed and grieved at the recollection of the many iniquities which we have committed, and have we looked back with contrition and regret on the influence which sin has had over our wills and affections? Have we been convinced of the beauty of holiness? Have we conceived a taste for spiritual duties and pleasures? Have we longed to be released from the slavery of corruption, and to enjoy that liberty which consists in a freedom from the power of sin?

4th. What have been our views of Jesus Christ, and of His sufficiency in respect to these our many spiritual wants? Have we seen His fulness as revealed to us in the Gospel? Have we been persuaded that He is able to bestow on us that pardon and peace, that wisdom and strength, that liberty and holiness, of which we stand in need?—Under this persuasion have we come to Him for these spiritual blessings? Have we committed ourselves, our souls, and all their interests, to His mercy and power, and faithfulness?—Are we now actually living in dependance upon Him, as our prophet, priest, and king, for the supply of all our wants; for support under all our temptations; for direction in all our difficulties; for victory over all our enemies? In His blood are we trusting

for forgiveness? In His strength are we struggling against sin? In His steps are we endeavouring to walk?

My brethren, have such been the feelings and convictions, the wishes and desires, which have been wrought in our souls? Is such the present state and disposition of our heart? Then have we Faith in Christ. Then have we received Him, and have believed in His name. And what is the conclusion which follows? Then are we born of God, and are adopted into His family. This is a conclusion, which we cannot resist, without resisting the Scriptures themselves. Why, indeed, should we attempt to resist it? If the Spirit of God in the word bear witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, why should we doubt or oppose this testimony? Rather let us thankfully receive it. Rather let us rejoice in our privilege. Bearing in mind the grace which has been vouchsafed to us, and the dignity to which we have been raised, let us strive to live worthy of our holy calling; and labour to show that we are indeed the regenerated and adopted children of God, by walking in His Spirit, and bringing forth the fruits of righteousness.

On the other hand, does conscience bear witness against us? In reference to the questions which have been put, does it se-

cretly say to any of us, "You know nothing of all these things. You are a stranger to all these feelings, convictions, and desires?"—Then it is plain, that we have not Faith in Christ: and, being destitute of Faith, we are not the children of God. This is a conclusion as certain as the one which we before considered. We may deny, but we cannot refute it. We may disbelieve, but we cannot set it aside. The testimony is sure. We believe not in Christ: therefore we are still in our sins; still in the flesh, and consequently as yet shut out from the family of God. We are neither regenerated by His Spirit, nor adopted by His grace. O let us consider, before it is too late, the awful misery of such an apostate condition. Let us humbly cast ourselves before the throne of mercy, and earnestly pray for a blessing from above. Let us pray that we may be born of God. Let us pray that we may have Faith to receive the Lord Jesus Christ, and to believe in His name. Let us pray that we may have power to become the children of God. And may the Lord both teach us to pray, and send us an answer of peace, for His name and His mercies' sake.

SERMON IV.

THE LOVE OF GOD IN REDEMPTION.

JOHN, iii. 16.

For God so loved the world, that He gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

THE great fundamental truths of the Gospel are few and simple, easily understood and readily remembered. At the same time, because they are fundamental, because they lie at the very foundation of our faith and practice, they cannot be too clearly explained, or too frequently inculcated. Those who know their value, will never be weary of hearing them stated; for "they love the joyful sound:" while such as are satiated or disgusted with the repetition of them, plainly show that they have never as yet heard or understood them to any real purpose. I shall therefore deem no apology necessary for leading you to a consideration of those plain, but momentous truths, which the words of

Christ himself in the text suggest to us. "For God so loved the world, that He gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." And may the Spirit of Christ be so present with us in discoursing on these words, that the Truths suggested by them may come home to all our hearts with a savour, an energy, and an unction which we have never felt before!

The *First* great Truth of which the text reminds us is this, that the Love of God is the prime, moving cause of our Salvation. As it is true of every individual among us, that if we now love God, "it is because He first loved us:" that if we are now walking in newness of life, it is because "God, who is rich in mercy, of his great love wherewith He loved us, hath quickened us together with Christ:" so it is equally true of the whole scheme of Redemption in general, that it is altogether the effect and the result of the Love of God. It was because God loved the world, that He provided a ransom, a salvation for it.—And of what nature was this Love? It was not a Love of approbation and complacency. God could not approve the world, and regard it with pleasure and affection. For it was an evil world; a world lying in wickedness; a guilty, a rebellious, an apostate world. There was

nothing in the state of the world which could recommend it to the favour of God, or make it an object which He could regard with satisfaction and delight. Neither was there any thing in it, which could *prospectively* attract his love. It could make Him no suitable return. "Our goodness reacheth not unto God." Infinitely blessed and glorious in Himself, He stood in need of nothing in this world, which might add to his essential happiness and glory. Had the world perished for ever, His blessedness would not have been lessened. Instead of devising a way of saving this world, He might, with one almighty word, have created a thousand worlds superior to it in every respect, surpassing it in beauty and excellence, and free from every taint and possibility of evil.—Of what kind, then, was His Love? It was a Love of pity and compassion. God pitied the world: and pity is akin to love. He saw its beauty marred; its glory extinguished; its happiness destroyed. He saw the creatures, whom he had made, sunk and debased in sin: his own blessed image effaced from their soul; heaven shut for ever against them; hell opened to receive them; misery and ruin their portion for ever. He saw all these things, and He was moved with compassion for them. He saw their lost and desperate condition, and pitied it; and in

pity planned and provided a way of deliverance for them. "He saw that there was no man; and wondered that there was no intercessor: He looked, and there was none to help, and He wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore his own arm brought Salvation." And what was the Salvation which His love prompted Him to bring? "He gave his only-begotten Son."

This is the *Second* Truth suggested in the Text.—The Scriptures, in speaking of the Love of God in our Redemption, never attempt to explain or describe its dimensions. They always represent it as a Love which "passeth knowledge:" a Love, the breadth, and depth, and length, and height of which are to us at present utterly incomprehensible. —"Behold! (says St. John) *what manner* of *love* the Father has bestowed upon us!" What *manner!* but there he stops, nor pretends to delineate and define it. So in the text Christ Himself only says, "God *so* loved the world." But how greatly, how wonderfully, how intensely, in what measure, and to how great a degree, he attempts not to explain.—It is not indeed *by words* that an adequate idea of Love can at any time be conveyed. Language must always prove a very insufficient mode of giving to any one a correct idea of the degree in which another loves him. It is by *actions*, that not only the

sincerity, but also the measure of affection is shown. If a person makes great sacrifices for us, puts himself to great inconveniences on our account, encounters troubles and dangers for our sake, we are led to believe that he loves us greatly. We estimate the extent of his love to us by the extent of his services for us. And in this way the Scriptures endeavour to give us some just conception of the Love of God in our Redemption. They direct us to consider *what* He has *done* to save the world, that so we may the better apprehend the *degree* of love which He bears to it. His Love has been shown in his *actions*. It has been evidenced to us, not by words only, but by deeds. Thus St. John tells us, "In this was manifested the Love of God towards us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world."— And thus Christ says in the text, "God so loved the word, that He gave his only-begotten Son."—This Gift of His Son, His only-begotten Son, was the manifestation and the measure of His Love to man. And how great, how vast, must that Love be, which led to *such* a manifestation of itself! How deep, how tender, how intense must be the Love of God to men, when for their sakes he withheld not his Son, his only Son, but freely gave Him up for them all! It will help us, however, in our meditations on

this subject, to consider what is meant by God's *giving* his only-begotten Son; to enquire in what sense, in what way, to what end, did He *give* Him? By comparing the language of the text with the passage I have quoted from St. John, we shall see that God's *giving* his only-begotten Son was the same thing with his *sending him into the world.* When the Son of God became incarnate; when the Word was made flesh; when He who lay in the bosom of the Father, and was in the form of God, laid aside his glory, and took on Him the form of a Man; when He thus became Emmanuel, God with us, God in our nature — then God *gave* his only-begotten Son. He gave him as a ransom, a sacrifice, a propitiation for the world. For in thus *giving* Him to become incarnate, He gave Him up to all the consequences which that incarnation entailed. Consider what these were. He *gave* Him up to all the infirmities, trials, and temptations, to which our fallen nature is exposed — *gave* Him up to a life of trouble, affliction, and persecution: to be opposed and contradicted by sinners; to be reviled and insulted; to be beaten and spit upon — *gave* Him into the hands of his enemies; left Him, as it were for a season, in the power of Men and Devils, to endure all the sufferings which their utmost fury and malice could inflict

upon him — *gave* Him up to death, even the death of the Cross; that most painful and ignominious of all deaths — *gave* His soul an offering for sin, to be wounded for our transgressions, to be bruised for our iniquities, to experience inward agony, darkness, dismay, and all those unspeakable horrors, which, as the Surety and Substitute of Sinners, He was required to undergo. — This is what is meant by God's *giving* his Son. And when, for the sake of the world, this wicked and rebellious world of sinners, He *thus* gave His Son, his only-begotten Son, his dearly-beloved Son, surely we may form some faint conceptions at least, how exquisitely, how tenderly, he loved the world!

Let us now proceed to the *Third* Truth suggested in the text. This may be considered as the application of the preceding Two. "God loved the world, and gave His Son:" and why? "That whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." — The end for which God thus gave His Son was that we through Him might be saved. In considering this Truth there are two things to be noticed.

I. The way in which Salvation is here described.

II. The Persons to whom it is limited.

I. The Way in which Salvation is here

described is two-fold, negatively and positively; showing what shall *not* happen to those that are saved, and what *shall* happen to them. In other words, we are here reminded of the misery from which Salvation will deliver us; and of the blessedness to which it will exalt us: and in the review of these points we shall obtain still further discoveries of the Love of God to Man.

Salvation delivers us from the wrath to come. They who are saved "shall not perish." To perish is to die: but not simply to die; not to die a natural death: not to die once for all, and to be reduced to nothing; to have no more sense or life, or feeling for ever. No: to perish or die, in the meaning of the text, signifies to *die eternally;* to endure the bitter pains of eternal death: in other words, to be "driven with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power;" for ever to be deprived of his favour; to be shut up under his wrath; to be cast into hell-fire, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. This is the second Death; that death which is the wages of Sin; that death, to which all men have subjected themselves; for all have sinned. — This is to perish: and *thus* to perish is the natural, the necessary consequence of rebellion against God. — But to deliver us

from this death is one part of the Salvation provided for us. They who are saved, shall not thus perish. This was one part of that merciful design with which God gave his only-begotten Son; namely, to rescue and redeem us from eternal misery. The sufferings and death of Him who was God as well as Man, were a sacrifice for sin, which God was pleased to accept in the stead of those sufferings and of that death which sinners have deserved, and were condemned themselves to undergo. Thus by his stripes we are healed. By his death we live. — How great was the Love of God to the world, in that He was disposed at such a price to redeem mankind from the pains of hell!

But this was only a part of His gracious purpose. He had a further object in view. He designed, in giving his only-begotten Son, not only to deliver men from wrath, but to restore them to favour: not only to redeem them from hell, but to exalt them to heaven. They who are saved, not only "shall not perish, but shall have everlasting life." And who can comprehend what this expression means? When, indeed, we read that "God hath given to us eternal life," and "that this life is in His Son," we can understand, that in giving his only-begotten Son, God, in virtue of his mediation, in consideration of his perfect obedience unto

death, has restored to us a title to eternal life, and has opened to us again the door of the kingdom of heaven. — But who can understand, who can conceive, what that life implies, what that kingdom contains? To live for ever in peace, and happiness, and glory; to know God, to see Him, to serve Him, to dwell in His presence, to taste of His pleasures; to be for ever freed from every thing which is painful and evil, from trouble, sickness, and sin; to have all tears wiped away from our eyes; to put on a glorious immortality; to enter on an unfading inheritance; to be crowned with an eternal weight of glory — these are some few of the expressions used in Scripture to convey an idea of what Heaven is, of what those joys are, concerning which it is after all declared, that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard them, neither have they entered into the heart of man."* Yet to bring us to this heaven, to put us into possession of those joys, was the other part of that rich, that merciful design, for which God gave His only-begotten Son. How great, how deep, how exquisite must be His Love to man, which led him to plan, to provide, and to complete by such means such a Salvation for them! But we notice,

II. The Persons to whom this sal-

* 1 Cor. ii. 9.

vation is limited. Will *all* men partake of it? Will *all* be saved? Will *all* be delivered from wrath? Will *all* be received into heaven? The Scriptures answer, No, to these enquiries. The text points out to us the Persons to whom this salvation will belong, for whom it is intended, to whom it is limited; even *Believers* in Jesus Christ. God hath given "His only-begotten Son, that whosoever *believeth* in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." This, indeed, is that one qualification, which the Scriptures uniformly lay down as indispensable to salvation, Belief in the Son of God. "He that believeth on Him is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already." "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: he that believeth not (whether he may have been baptized or not) shall be damned."* But there is no occasion to multiply texts on a point so plain as this. The Salvation of the Gospel is designed and prepared for Believers in Christ; it is promised and limited to them. And who are meant by Believers in Christ? Those who receive and welcome Him as their divine Lord and Saviour; who

* John, iii. 18. 36.—Mark, xvi. 16.

flee to Him for refuge, cast themselves upon His mercy, trust in His merits and promises, and submit to Him as their Prophet, Priest, and King; those who, renouncing their own righteousness, seek only to be found in His; who, feeling their own weakness, lean only on the hope of His heavenly grace; who denying themselves, their own corrupt and evil inclinations, take up their cross and follow Him; those in whose estimation He is precious, in whose affection He dwells, in whose heart He reigns, in whose lives He is manifested.—Such are believers in Christ. Such are the Persons to whom the salvation of the Gospel is limited. To these only it is promised. These only are the Persons "who shall not perish, but shall have everlasting life." And what, then, my brethren, what, as a minister of the Gospel, as a preacher of Salvation, as your best and sincerest friend, what have I to do, but to invite, to urge, to entreat you thus to believe in the only-begotten Son of God? And on this subject what arguments can I adduce more powerful, more persuasive, than those which the very discussion of the subject has suggested?

Hath God so loved you as to have given his only-begotten Son, that you might not perish, but may have everlasting life? And *will* you perish after all? Will you *not* have

everlasting life? Will you reject these offers of mercy? Will you disregard this wonderful exhibition of Almighty love?

Consider what you are, and what you have been doing. Think of all your rebellion against God; of your many sins committed against Him; of the opposition and enmity which there are in your heart to his holy will and holy ways; and then reflect with yourselves, whether it is not very wonderful that God should have provided you with any Saviour at all, but especially with *such* a Saviour. Is it not a very convincing proof how deeply He pities you, how earnestly He wishes your happiness, that of his own accord He gave up his only Son to suffer and to die for your salvation; and will it not be as convincing a proof of your ingratitude and determined hostility against Him, if you persist in rejecting this Salvation? Love ought to beget love: and the heart which is not won by kindness and goodness, is hard indeed.

Consider also more particularly, what is the return which God requires of you for all this love. It is to believe in His only-begotten Son; to receive *Him* for your Master, who is the kindest of all Masters; to submit to *Him* as your King, who is the best of all Kings; to follow *Him* for your Counsellor, who is the wisest of all Counsellors; to take *Him* for your Friend, who

is the firmest of all Friends; to trust in *Him* as your Saviour, who is not merely a great, a sufficient, an Almighty, but the *only* Saviour. Is there any thing in all this requisition which is hard, which is grievous; any thing to which you can reasonably object?

Consider, further, *why* this return is demanded of you; *to what end* you are required thus to believe on the Son of God. Not for His benefit, but for yours; not to profit God, but yourselves. It is your own personal salvation which is at stake. It is your own individual misery or happiness which depends upon your compliance with this requisition: and remember, it is your happiness or misery *for ever*. If you believe not, you perish; and you perish for ever. The wrath of God will abide on you eternally; and will abide on you the more heavily, because you have rejected his love. If you believe, you will have life, even life for ever and ever. You will be safe and secure in the hour of death. While your body sleeps in the earth, your spirit will be happy in paradise. At the last day, when the trumpet shall sound, you will have a joyful resurrection. Your body will be raised incorruptible. Your soul will be united to it in glory; and both will live together in heaven for ever and ever.

My brethren, can I say any thing more to induce your compliance? If these things will not convince, will not persuade you; the reason is plain: you do not give credit to them. Your heart is shut up in unbelief. You do not really believe one word which I have been speaking to you: nay (of what moment is it, that you believe not what *I* say), you do not really believe one word which *Jesus Christ Himself* has said in the text, has said to you in the Gospel. You hear his sayings, but do not receive them in faith and love. They sound in your ears, they float in your heads, but they do not sink into your hearts. *There* other things have possession, and not the word of Christ. *There* pride, or lust, or the world, or sin, in some shape or other, occupy the chief place, and shut out the things which belong to your real peace: for while any of these works of the flesh have rule within, Christ will not enter, and you cannot believe. Pray, then, for strength to resist and to overcome this strong man armed. Pray that a stronger than he may come upon him, and cast him out. Pray that you may have the will and the power to receive Jesus Christ. If you have once decidedly the will, it will not be long before you have the power. He, who giveth the will, will give the power. He, who entered into the world to purify and to

save it, will enter into your heart with all His purifying and saving efficacy, and will teach you to know in truth the blessedness of having the Son of God for your Saviour.

Are there not some who already know this blessedness? Some who have tasted his grace; who have felt his power; who have experienced his love? Such (as I remarked, at the beginning of this discourse) will rejoice to hear the glorious truths, which I have been attempting to unfold; those good tidings of great joy which these gracious words so manifestly proclaim, "that God so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." Tidings of great joy *indeed!* Blessed and glorious truths! May you, who feel them to be so, live in the full enjoyment of the privileges which they involve; in the faithful discharge of the duties and obligations which they impose! Live as become those who are made partakers of such a benefit; who have experienced such a love; are redeemed at such a price; belonging to such a Saviour; are saved from such a death; and are risen to such a life. Walk in faith and obedience. Depend only on the Spirit to work in you to will and to do. Be instant in prayer. Be patient in well-doing. Go through evil report, and good report. And may the

Lord comfort and establish your hearts! May He confirm your peace; invigorate your hopes; cheer and refresh you by his presence; and cause all things to work together for your present and everlasting good, for His mercy's sake, through Jesus Christ!

SERMON V.

THE CALL OF THE GOSPEL TO SINNERS.

EPHESIANS, v. 14.

Wherefore He saith, Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee Light.

THESE words may be considered as the great Call of God to sinners in the Gospel of his Son. In many ways, and by different persons, He has at different times delivered this Call; by the Prophets in their preaching and writings; by John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ; by Christ Himself; by His Apostles after Him; by His ministers ever since; by the inspired writings of the New Testament; by the exemplary and holy lives of true Christians in every age; by the secret and continual suggestions of the Holy Spirit. All these, as it were with one voice, proclaim the Call in the Text. By all of them the Lord delivers the same message to mankind. "He saith, Awake, Thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead,

and Christ shall give thee light." In endeavouring on the present occasion to enforce this Call, and, with the divine blessing, to bring it home to the hearts of all those whom it may concern, I shall show,

I. The State in which the Gospel finds mankind.

II. The Duty which it calls on them to discharge.

III. The Encouragement which it affords for discharging it.

I. The State in which the Gospel finds mankind is represented in the text as a state of *sleep* and of *death*. "Awake, Thou that *sleepest*, and arise from the *dead*." These expressions are doubtless figurative, and are intended to describe the *spiritual* condition of the person addressed, that is, the state of his soul with respect to God and Religion. Taking the words then in their most natural and obvious sense, without putting on them any forced and strained interpretation, they clearly imply that the Gospel finds men in a state of great insensibility and unconcern with respect to the things of another world, and of extreme indisposition and unwillingness to set about the work of true Religion. Such is the lowest sense which we can put upon these expressions; and a sense, which the experience of every day confirms and justifies.

How men came into this most awful state, this state of spiritual Sleep and Death, is a point which might be easily shown; for the Bible very clearly and fully explains it. But it is not a point into which I have now any occasion to enter. My present object is to remind you that this *is* the state of men; and, if possible, to convince those who may now be in it, of its danger and misery. With this view, let us consider with some attention the two particulars in which I have shown it to consist. First,

It is a State of Insensibility and Unconcern with respect to the things of another world. What can be plainer than that such is the state of mankind in general? Observe them: mix with them: talk to them. Do we find among them a *prevailing anxiety* about their souls, and spiritual things? Nay, do we in general discover *any* interest to be felt or expressed on these matters? Are men in general *awake* on the subject of Religion? Does it engage their thoughts? does it give a turn to their conversation? does it influence their actions? A very slight acquaintance with mankind will enable us to answer these questions. See how men in general are living, setting their affections upon the world, and the things of the world. See them running in different paths; some following one object, and some another; one

intent on gaining money, another wholly given to pleasure, a third labouring after fame, and honour; see them struggling, striving, contending with each other; but all agreeing in one thing, namely, to make the world their God, to push their own interests, and to gratify their selfish inclinations. What, in the mean time, becomes of Religion, and of the love of their souls? These things either come not at all into their thoughts; or, if they sometimes intrude, are speedily put off to a more convenient season. Or, if conscience will not be so pacified, a cheap and an easy Religion is taken up: a Religion which costs nothing, and consists only in notions and forms, that differ as much from the solid principles and spiritual services of real Religion, as the wild fancies of a dreaming man differ from the sound, connected reasonings of one who is awake. Thus men *sleep*. Busied about trifles, they overlook the great concerns of eternity. Having their mind darkened, they see no world but the present: they live as if they were to live here for ever: and if at any time this false peace is shaken, they try all means to prevent it from being destroyed, and to lull themselves again to rest. This indeed will more fully appear from considering, in the next place,

How Indisposed and Unwilling men are to

set about the work of true Religion. This is the second particular in their awful State as described in the text; — and surely the description is most just. If men were not thus indisposed to true Religion, whence could it happen, that they should so generally resist the convictions of God's good Spirit on their hearts, and so constantly oppose every endeavour to bring them to a serious and an holy frame of mind? Yet this is notoriously the case. Men naturally dislike religious instruction. They love darkness rather than light; and will not come to the light, lest their deeds should be reproved. We all know what difficulty there often is in prevailing with a person to attend regularly the House of God, when yet there is no one thing which actually prevents his attendance but his own indisposition to it. Ask him whence this indisposition arises; and if he conceal not the real cause, he will often say, that it arises from a dislike of hearing the truth. The minister is too plain with him; shows him his sins too clearly; makes Religion too strict and serious a thing. Hence he is offended, and from fear of having his peace disturbed, altogether avoids the hearing of the Gospel; or if he reluctantly attends where it is preached, only *seems* to hear it, and shuts his ears, and hardens his heart against it. The fact is, men

naturally love their sins too well to be induced to part with them for the sake of Religion. Having, in truth, no spiritual knowledge of God, and consequently no real desire after Him, nor any idea of finding pleasure in His service, they look upon Religion as a dull and a distasteful thing; and suppose that, by heartily embracing it, they should relinquish much present enjoyment, and receive nothing in return to compensate for their loss. To such a form of Religion, then, as will allow them still to retain their sins and to cleave to the world, they will not always object: nay, they can even find a sort of pleasure in complying with it; for it gratifies their pride, and quiets their conscience. But from true, real, scriptural Religion, a Religion which claims the heart, which requires purity in the inward parts, and enforces universal holiness in every one who professes it, they turn away with disgust; and thus say to God in their hearts, "Depart from us." — Surely, this is indeed to be dead in sin: for it is to be without any spiritual life and feeling, which is the only true life of the soul. What a wretched State then is that described in the text; the State, in which the Gospel finds mankind; a State of *sleep* and *death*, of ignorance and unconcern about true Religion, of dislike and enmity to it! I say,

what a wretched State is this! For be it remembered, my brethren, that nothing but Religion can save the soul from perishing. Nothing but this very Religion, of which men are so ignorant, about which they care so little, against which they have conceived such a dislike, can in the end deliver them from everlasting shame, sorrow, and punishment. Here then is their extreme misery and danger. They are unconcerned about an object, which of all others ought to concern them most; and are set against the only remedy, which can be of any real service to them. They are every moment liable to fall into utter perdition: but they are not aware of their danger, and reject the only hand which is stretched out to save them. May the Lord open the eyes of all who are in this state, to see and flee from it! May He give to them ears to hear, and a heart to obey the important Call in the text! This is the second thing which I proposed to consider:

II. The Duty which the Gospel calls on them to discharge.

This Duty, as it is here expressed, is to *awake* out of sleep, and to *arise* from the dead. The admonition is given in terms answering to those in which the state is described. Let those who are asleep, *awake*. Let those who are dead, *arise*. The persons

addressed are called upon to do *in their state* the same thing, as it would be for a sleeping man, *in his state*, to awake, or for a dead man to arise. Having seen, then, what their *State* is, we can the more easily point out their *Duty*.

Their duty is to *consider* their state and their danger, to break off their sins by repentance, and to *seek* the knowledge and the favour of God. This is the Call of the Gospel to every one who may be in the state described.

1. *Consider thy state and thy danger.* What is the great cause why men are so indifferent to Religion, so careless about their soul, so devoted to the world, so wholly taken up with the things of time and sense, but that they will *not consider?* They will *not* set their mind seriously to think on the subject of Religion, and the awful concerns of Eternity. Instead of encouraging such thoughts, they wilfully put them away, and try to shut them out from the mind. They will *not* endure soberly to reflect on the shame, and misery, and contempt in which a worldly, an ungodly, and a sensual life will certainly end. They drive away reflections of this nature. Here then is the first part of the duty to which they are called. "Awake, thou that sleepest." — Consider thy ways, thy state, and thy danger. — Let

this thought dwell on thy mind, 'I have a 'soul as well as a body.' And let this question accompany the thought, 'What will 'become of my soul? Will it be happy or 'miserable?' — Call seriously to mind the shortness and uncertainty of life; and the vanity which is thus stamped on all earthly things. Think thus with thyself, 'I am 'alive to-day, but I may be dead to-morrow: 'and in what state shall I then be?' — Remember that there is a God, a just and a holy God in Heaven; and a Judgment, a solemn, and an awful Judgment, to come; and then think whether thou art fit to appear before God, and to stand in judgment with Him. Say to thyself, 'What will it then 'profit me to have gained the whole world? 'I am living an ungodly life, I dare not 'meet God. I see my danger, I have 'never considered these things as I ought 'to have considered them. Sin and the 'world have ruined my soul.' — To such serious consideration add,

2. *Repentance. Break off thy sins by repentance.* No longer live in this careless, ungodly state. No longer follow the world, as if there were nothing deserving of thy thought and care, but the success of thy worldly schemes, or the pursuit of thy worldly pleasures. Walk no more with the multitude in the broad way to destruction,

nor do evil because others do it. Separate thyself from wicked and worldly companions; and have no longer any "fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness." Desist from forbidden practices; renounce unjust gains: discontinue unlawful pleasures. Flee from temptation. Shun the places and the employments which may be likely to prove a snare to thy soul. Watch over thy heart. Examine its motives. Redeem the time.

3. *Seek the knowledge and the favour of God.* No longer remain ignorant of that God, to whom thou owest thy life, thy breath, and all things; on whom thou dependest for every thing which thou hast, and wantest; who made thee, who preserves thee, who is about thy path, and about thy bed, and spieth out all thy ways. No longer continue indifferent to His favour; regardless whether He be thy friend or thy enemy, despising His mercy and provoking His wrath. But seek after Him, and acquaint thyself with Him. Seek to know Him. Seek His favour. Use the means which He has appointed to be used for the attainment of these things. Waste not the Lord's Day in idleness, or pleasure, or worldly matters. But employ it in holy exercises, and to holy purposes, in frequenting His house, in reading His word, in praying to Him for His blessing on thee. Call upon the Lord for mercy; confess thy

sins to Him; implore His forgiveness through the Gospel of His Son. Beseech Him to accept and pardon thee for Christ's sake; to teach thee by His good Spirit, to pity thy weakness, to help thy infirmities, to take thee into His family, and to make thee an heir of everlasting salvation. — *Thus*, awake from thy sleep; *thus*, arise from the dead. This is the duty to which thou art called in the text. Observe,

III. The encouragement, which it affords for discharging it. — "And Christ will give thee Light."

Light is a word often used in Scripture to denote spiritual blessings; and when thus used, it generally signifies either Knowledge, Peace, or Holiness. It may be here taken in all three senses. All these blessings Jesus Christ is ready to bestow on every one who obeys the Call in the text: yea, He engages and promises that He *will* bestow them.

"Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead." Consider thy State, and thy danger; break off thy sins by repentance; seek the knowledge and the favour of God, and Christ will give thee,

1. *Knowledge.* He will enlighten thy darkened mind. He will teach thee by His good Spirit, and will effectually lead thee into all saving truth. Thou shalt no longer

be ignorant of God and of his ways. Thy understanding shall be opened to understand the Scriptures; thy heart shall be disposed to receive and relish divine truth. — Are there not some among us who can testify to these things? Some, who *have been* awakened and quickened; and who, comparing their past with their present state, can each for himself confidently say, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see." 'Once 'I was sadly ignorant of God, and of my 'duty. I knew nothing of my own heart, 'nothing of the way of salvation. I was in 'darkness and in the shadow of death. But 'Christ has given me light. He has taken 'away the veil from my eyes. He has 'brought me by a way that I knew not. 'He has led me into paths I did not know. 'I asked, and it has been given me. I 'sought, and I have found. I knocked, 'and it has been opened to me.'

2. Christ also will give thee *Peace.* This is another blessing, which, on obeying the Call in the text, thou shalt receive. At present thou art a stranger to peace. It is utterly impossible that thou canst know what real peace is: for Sin and the World cannot give peace. The utmost peace which they can give is that fearlessness, which arises from ignorance of danger: such as a sleeping man might experience,

while a drawn sword were suspended by a single hair over his head. But far different is the peace which Christ will give. It is a real, solid, positive peace; a peace which springs not from ignorance, but from knowledge: not from seeing no danger, but from seeing a way of safety, a door of escape from all danger. *Now*, whatever peace thou mayest have, arises from not knowing and not feeling that thou art a sinner, and daily exposed to the wrath of God: but the peace which Christ offers thee, is a peace which will arise from a consciousness, that thy sins are forgiven, and that although thou art a sinner, thou art yet reconciled to God. This is *true Peace.* And *How* will Christ give thee this Peace? By showing thee that He Himself is become thy Peace; that having taken thy sins upon Himself, and suffered for them on the Cross, He has made thy peace with God: by teaching and enabling thee to trust in His blood and righteousness, and promises, and so to apply to thyself the all-sufficient benefits of His obedience unto death. My brethren, do not some of us know what *this* peace is? Do not we feel the difference between that false, presumptuous security which we once had, and the firm, substantial comfort, which we now enjoy in Christ Jesus? I trust we do. I

trust we can truly say, 'I was dead, but 'am alive. I was in darkness, but Christ 'has given me light. I knew not the way 'of peace, but He has shed abroad in my 'heart that peace, which passeth all under-'standing, which the world can neither give 'nor take away.'

3. Christ will give thee *Holiness*. Remember that without Holiness thou canst never see the Lord. Holiness is our meetness for heaven. It is that state and disposition of heart which alone can fit us for seeing and serving God. At present thou knowest nothing of this state of heart. It is impossible, while thou sleepest, and art dead in Sin, that thou canst know any thing of it. But obey the Call in the text. — Awake, arise, and Christ will give thee light. He will make thee holy. He will change and sanctify thy heart. He will cause thee to love him, and to find pleasure in His ways. Obedience to God shall be thy delight; and the sin, of which thou art now so fond, shall become thy aversion, thy burden, and thy grief. — May I not again hope, that some of us can testify to the reality of this change also? Have we not found this blessed effect, in some degree at least, wrought upon our hearts? All who have really come to Christ in the Gospel, must have found it thus: for wheresoever He gives *Knowledge*,

and *Peace*, He assuredly gives *Holiness* also. These things are never separated. And where Christ gives these, He will as assuredly give more. He will give also Eternal Life: for all these blessings are the steps to Heaven, and the earnest of it.

Upon the whole, what Encouragement is there to obey the Call in the Text! Since Christ is ready, and has promised to give such great and glorious blessings to those who obey His call, why should any of you continue in a state of sleep and death? May His grace accompany the Call to your hearts! May His Spirit rouse and quicken you! So shall you awake indeed, and be roused to newness of life. So shall you die unto sin and live unto righteousness. Be warned. Be admonished. Sleep not till you awake in another world, and find too late that a Death in sin here will surely end in Death Eternal hereafter.

SERMON VI.

CHRIST'S INVITATION TO THE HEAVY LADEN.

MATTHEW, xi. 28.

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

ONE reason why men esteem Religion so little is, that they so little understand it. They know not its worth and excellence. They are not aware of the consolation and delight which it would yield, if they would but heartily embrace it. They look upon it as a dull and an unprofitable thing. They think, that it would make them gloomy, would spoil their enjoyments, and destroy their peace. But how great is their mistake! Did they see the matter aright, they would know, that to be truly religious, is in fact another expression for being truly happy. Would they but make trial of the ways of God, they would find in them that real enjoyment, that practical satisfaction, which they are vainly seeking in other ways. There is no passage more likely to fix this truth

upon our minds, than the one which I have read to you. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." — May God vouchsafe his blessing to us, while I endeavour to explain and apply these gracious words!

I shall with this view lead you to consider,

I. The Person speaking, and the Persons spoken to.

II. The Words addressed to them.

I. The Person speaking. — This is a point of the greatest moment: a point on which the whole depends. When any one makes an offer, gives a promise, or enjoins a command, the first thing which we are concerned to know is this, By what *authority* doeth he these things? Is he one whom we may credit? Is he able to make good his offers? Is he willing to fulfil his promises? Has he a right to enjoin these things? Till we are satisfied on these points, we cannot be fully persuaded to believe and to do all that he says: we cannot perfectly repose in him our confidence, nor implicitly follow his commands. Who then is the person speaking in the text? What is his authority? What are *his* claims to our faith and obedience? He is One, whom we have the strongest reasons to believe and obey: for the Father, by a voice from heaven, has said of Him, "This is my beloved Son, hear ye *Him*." He is

One, whose Word we cannot distrust; for He is the Truth itself, the Faithful Witness, who cannot lie nor be deceived. He is One, whose Power we cannot question; for He has all power in heaven and in earth, according to what He Himself declares in the verse before the text, "All things are delivered unto me of my Father." He is One, whose Willingness to fulfil His offers we cannot doubt: for He came into the world to save Sinners. He, who was willing to lay down His life for our souls, cannot but be willing to do for us all that He has promised. On every ground, therefore, He has the strongest claim to our attention and our confidence. We may rely on what He says with full assurance. He has not said more than He is authorised to say, or than He is able and willing to fulfil. He tells us nothing but what is most certainly true. He directs us to nothing but what is absolutely for our good. He promises nothing but what He will surely perform. How greatly ought we to value the words of such a friend! How diligently should we listen to them! How readily obey them! May we be more thankful for them than we have been! May we regard them more attentively, love them better, and try to fix them deeper in our hearts!

Such is the Person who is here speaking.

We consider, in the next place, the Persons to whom he speaks. And who are these? Who are the Persons, to whom the compassionate Friend of Sinners *should* speak, but the miserable and the distressed; but those, who claim his pity and stand in need of his advice? Such were the persons whom He came from heaven to save; and to *such* He speaks in the text. "All ye that labour and are heavy laden." Here are two words employed to describe their state; both of which convey the same description of it. They agree in representing it to be hard, and painful, and afflicting. The Persons spoken of are described as *labouring*, toiling hard, spending their strength, and wasting their spirits. They are also said to be *heavy laden*, groaning under a burden, which they can with difficulty bear, encumbered with a load, which they can scarcely drag along. Such are the Persons to whom the Saviour speaks. He speaks to *all* who answer this description; to sufferers of every kind; to all, whatever the cause, whatever the nature of their toil may be, "who labour and are heavy laden." May they attend to the point which is now to be considered, namely,

II. The Words addressed to them.

It was foretold of Christ, that one part of His work would be, to "comfort all that mourn." We here find Him tenderly ful-

filling this gracious office. He not only looks on the unhappy sufferer, and has compassion on him; but, like the Good Samaritan, binds up his wounds, "pouring in oil and wine." While He pities all who "labour and are heavy-laden," He shows them where to go for comfort and relief. "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest." These Words contain a Direction and a Promise.

"Come unto me." This is the *Direction.* When Christ directs the objects of His pity where to go for help, He does not send them to others; He invites them to Himself, "Come unto *Me.*" Let us see what is meant by this expression. When Christ first gave the invitation, He was on earth; and persons might have literally complied with it. They might have come into His presence. But now they cannot come to Him in this way. He is now in heaven, and no man can literally come to Him, into His presence. Nor if they could, would they comply with the meaning of the invitation. By coming to Him is meant, not merely the coming into His presence, even when it could have been literally done, but the coming to Him with right views, dispositions, and desires. Those who would have come to Jesus when on earth, in the real meaning and spirit of the invitation, would have come to Him with a disposition to receive and fol-

low His instructions, with a heart prepared to submit to His authority, and to comply with His commands. In other words, they would have come to Him *in faith*, hoping for a blessing at His hands, and desirous and disposed to seek it in any way in which He might direct them to seek it. *Thus* they would *then* have come to Him, had they come, as He intended they should. And *thus* then we may still come to Him. We may still come to Him *in faith*, with these dispositions and desires: for though He be not now on earth, personally present with us; yet He is still present with us by His Spirit. He reveals himself to us in His word: there we may seek and come to Him. He meets His people in His Ordinances: there we may find and come to Him. By faith and prayer we may still approach Him. In relying on His promises, in obeying His commands, we may still comply with His invitation. Renouncing all other lords and masters, and choosing Him for our Saviour and our King, we still may come to Him.

Let us advert next to the Promise which is added: "I will give you rest." *Rest* is the blessing promised. And what blessing is so suitable as rest to those who labour and are heavy-laden? It is the very blessing of which they stand most in need, and which, when once attained, they will most sensibly

value and enjoy. This blessing then Christ will *give* to them. He will *freely* confer it on them. It is a blessing to which they have antecedently no claim; and of which they are wholly undeserving. They can do nothing to merit it. They have no right to expect it. But as a free and a gracious gift, it is offered unto them, and shall be bestowed upon them. The Faithfulness and Power of Christ are pledged to bestow this gift. He hath said, "I will give you rest." The direction and the promise are closely and inseparably joined together. If the persons addressed will but follow the direction, they shall experience the promise. If they will but comply with the invitation, they shall taste the blessing. Let them with their heart believe on Jesus as their Saviour, and submit to Him as their King; and His word shall be fulfilled unto them. They shall no longer labour and be heavy-laden. They "shall find rest unto their souls."—Such is the meaning of the Promise.

Having thus led you to consider the Person here speaking, and the Persons spoken to, together with the gracious Words addressed to them, I now purpose to make a more close application of the subject.

It may more particularly be asked, *whom* did our Lord mean by those who labour and are heavy-laden? He meant us all. There

are none whom the description would not suit. Every man, in some way or other, labours and is heavy-laden. He is groaning under a burden, from which none but Christ can set him free. He may not, indeed, be sensible of his state. But this insensibility only increases his real misery. For till he feel his burden, he will never seriously come to Christ for rest. When, therefore, the minister of the Gospel looks round on any congregation, and considers how many persons there may possibly be present who thus labour, and are heavy-laden, who *might* find rest unto their souls; but who, from ignorance of their state, and from an insensibility of their burden, are kept from coming to Jesus Christ; he cannot but be touched with a tender compassion for their condition; he cannot but be stirred up with an anxious desire of being profitable to them, and, if possible, of leading them where only they can find true peace and lasting happiness. Happiness, my brethren, is the object of your search. You are all wishing to be happy. You are seeking it in a variety of ways. But, so long as you are not seeking it in Jesus Christ, you "are walking in a vain shadow, and are disquieting yourselves in vain." You are following an object, which you can never overtake. You are seeking for happiness, where it never can be

found. Prove whether this be not the case. Examine the matter. Bring it to the test. What have been the plans in which you have looked for happiness? Say, have they answered your expectations? Have you found happiness in them? Do you find in them a rest for your soul?

Speak *you* first, who are following worldly pleasures: who place and seek your enjoyment in sensual gratifications, in frivolous amusements, in folly, vanity, and vice; say, do you find in these things real, inward, substantial peace? Is your soul fully at ease in the midst of these delights? We know that it is not. If you will own the truth, you will confess, that notwithstanding your seeming mirth, your apparent enjoyments, you are not really happy. You find a vacancy in your soul, which these pleasures cannot fill. You are secretly dissatisfied with yourself. Your own conscience at times condemns you. You shun serious reflection. You dare not to look into your own heart, and closely to compare it with the word of God. You often run into company and riot, in order to get rid of your thoughts, and to fly from yourself. — Surely this is not happiness. This is not rest. It is to labour and to be heavy-laden, however little you may own or feel it. The service of sin is a hard service. It destroys present peace, and

precludes future happiness; while it has this evil especially belonging to it, that the wretched captive sees not his misery, and even loves his chain. — How different would be your state, if you would comply with the direction in the text! If you would come to Christ, and take his yoke, you would find the happiness which you are in vain seeking in sinful and worldly pleasures. True religion, heartily embraced, and diligently followed, would yield a satisfaction and a delight, to which you now are strangers.—May He, who calls you to Him, incline your hearts to come. So shall you find rest unto your souls!

Let *those* speak next, who are seeking their happiness in the pursuit, or in the possession, of worldly wealth. You, my brethren, are aiming to be rich; at least to do well, to prosper in the world. You are striving to advance yourselves and families. You are labouring to lay up much goods for many years. But are you really happy, while thus engaged? Do you find in these things full satisfaction and solid peace? No. You find that they are unsatisfying. The fancied good, which you are following, is frequently not obtained; and when obtained, it seldom, it *never* answers the expectation which you had formed of it. One trouble or another comes with it, which takes away

nearly all the comfort which you had hoped to draw from it. You find vanity written on every worldly enjoyment. Yet still you cease not from the pursuit. Your thoughts and talents, your days and nights, are anxiously employed in following the shadow, which continually escapes your hold, and disappoints your grasp. — Surely this is to labour in vain, and to be heavy-laden to no purpose. — Come *ye* also unto Christ, and make trial of His ways and promises. Come, as you have seen you are required to come to Him, in faith and obedience, and you shall find the truth of His word; you shall taste a happiness, which, while it fully satisfies, will never cloy. Freed from your present anxieties, and subject no more to such continual disappointments, you shall find a solid and a lasting peace in your soul. Christ will give you rest. In a sense of his love and favour, in his promises of grace and pardon, in fellowship with the Father and with the Son, in the consolations of the Holy Spirit, in the hope of eternal glory, you shall find a source of peace and joy; such as the world cannot give, and such as it can never take away. Call to mind the power, the faithfulness, and the mercy of Him, who has said, "Take my yoke upon you, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." — May His Spirit convince you of the heavy

yoke which you now endure; that so you may prefer his light and easy burden!

But there is one description of persons, to whom the text applies with very peculiar force, and who, in an especial manner, are concerned to listen to the gracious invitation here vouchsafed. They are *those* who labour under a sense of guilt; who, being heavy-laden with the burden of unpardoned sin, are afraid of the wrath to come. My brethren, the time was when you felt nothing of this kind. You were whole in your own esteem. If you *said* that you were a sinner, you did not *feel* that you were one. But it is not so now. Your eyes have been opened. Your conscience has been awakened. You are sensible that God has a long account against you. You have broken His holy laws. You have slighted the Gospel of His grace. You have contracted a heavy debt, and have nothing to pay. Thus your "sins have gone over your head as a sore burden; they are a heavy burden, too heavy for you to bear." You know not how to get rid of it. You try, but try in vain, to satisfy the demands of conscience. You endeavour, it may be, by self-imposed duties and severities, to make amends for past offences. You resolve to sin no more. You shun bad company and evil practices. But, notwithstanding all these attempts, the bur-

den still remains. Your sense of guilt increases. The load of unpardoned sin hangs heavier on you. You daily become more conscious of your own inability to remove it. You are, indeed, heavy-laden, and groan, being burdened. But what says Christ in the text to you, and such as you? "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." Here is your remedy. In Christ is a cure for every disorder; a balm for every wound. He will take away your burden. By coming to Him you shall be set free. That pardon, which you so greatly need, is laid up for you in Him, and in Him alone. He shed his own precious blood to purchase it. He will freely bestow it on all who come to Him for it. They shall have "Redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." Come, then, to Him, my brethren. Look to Him alone for the removal of your guilt. "He bore your sins in his own body on the Cross." "Take His yoke upon you, and learn of Him; and you shall find rest unto your souls." "Being justified by faith, you shall have peace with God, through Jesus Christ." Doubt not his willingness to receive and help you: for He hath Himself called you, and promised to receive you. "Come unto me *all* ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." Distrust not his truth and faith-

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fulness: for "He is faithful who has promised." Come to this merciful and compassionate Saviour, who calls you to Himself; who by His word, by His ministers, and by His Spirit, invites you to come to Him for rest, and peace, and happiness. Come to Him without fear, without delay. Come to Him in all the ways, in which he hath appointed you to come. Especially come to Him *in Faith.* Believing you shall receive. According to your faith it shall be done unto you. Wait on Him in prayer, believing; and in the end you shall find those gracious words addressed to you, "Go in peace, thy faith hath saved thee; thy sins are forgiven."

And here, my brethren, I might conclude my discourse, were it not possible that there may yet be some present, who, not exactly included in any of the classes hitherto described, are yet equally capable of deriving instruction and consolation from the text. I allude to the distressed and tempted Christians: to those who, having fled to Christ for refuge, and having found their guilt removed, and their peace restored, are now labouring under a new and unexpected burden, the burden of an evil heart, and of a daily conflict with the remaining power of sin. — Probably you might think, that on once coming to Jesus Christ, and having your conscience once purged from guilt, through Him, you

would have experienced no more sorrow, no more darkness; that every weight would have been taken away for ever; that all would be sunshine, peace, and joy. And, perhaps, for a time you found it thus. But at length clouds have arisen; the light has been obscured, and to a degree you are again walking in darkness; a darkness, not in itself so thick and horrible as that which formerly enveloped you; but, a darkness the more gloomy and distressing, because it is contrasted with the glorious light which you so lately have enjoyed, and which you had hoped to enjoy for ever without diminution or interruption. And whence has this change proceeded? From an increasing experience of the corruption and depravity of your heart. Freed from the burden of a guilty conscience, you are now groaning under the weight of a depraved nature. You thought that sin, when pardoned, would have given you no more trouble; that freed from condemnation, you would have been freed from corruption also. But to your surprise and grief, you now find that you were mistaken. Sin, which for a time seemed to be dead, has revived; and, though dethroned, still threatens and strives to resume its empire. Old propensities and former habits, which appeared to be subdued, again plead for their wonted gratifications; and notwithstanding past conflicts

and past triumphs, you still find "a law in your members, warring against the law of your mind, and bringing you into captivity to the law of sin, which is in your members." Dismayed and confounded at discovering so much evil, when you had fondly hoped that all evil had been almost extirpated, you are, perhaps, greatly cast down. You are tempted at times to distrust the faithfulness and power of Jesus Christ, or to question your own sincerity, and your consequent interest in his promises. You are ready to say, "If I am indeed a child of God, Why am I thus?" Or you adopt the language of St. Paul: "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" My brethren, let the words of the Apostle which immediately follow this complaint, show you what to do. "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord."* It is through Jesus that you must look for deliverance from this body of death. Those who labour as you are labouring, under a feeling sense of remaining sin, are equally included in the invitation in the text. "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." This increasing experience of the corruption of your hearts, and of the strength and power of sin in your soul, is designed for your spiritual good. It is one of the means which the Holy Spirit employs

* Romans, vii. 24, 25.

for more effectually mortifying your pride; for weaning you from self and from the world; for exciting your prayers; and for making Christ more precious in your eyes. Its object and tendency are to lead you to have less confidence in the flesh, and to rejoice more simply and truly in Jesus Christ. "Come to Him, and He will give you rest." Pray to Him for His help and support in this arduous conflict. Cast your burden upon Him, and plead your cause before Him. Pray to Him, that for *His name's* sake He would subdue your iniquities; and that *because* you are his servant and soldier, He would give you the victory. He will now hear your prayers. In due time He will answer them. He will allay the conflict of contending passions. He will say to the winds, and to the waves, "Be still;" and there will be a great calm. He will disperse the clouds. He will lighten your darkness. He will give you rest and peace, and you shall go on your way rejoicing.

SERMON VII.

THE SIN AND GUILT OF NOT OBEYING THE GOSPEL.

1 PETER, iv. 17.

What shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God?

ST. PETER here proposes a very important question, which, without referring to its immediate connection with the context, we shall do well to lay deeply and seriously to heart. All men living, to whom the Gospel comes, either do obey it, or do not obey it. With respect to the former, those who obey the Gospel, we know what will become of *them:* we know what *their* end will be. It will be happy, it will be glorious. All their afflictions will work out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. But what shall the end be of those that obey *not* the Gospel of God? What will become of *them?* The Apostle, having put the question, leaves his readers to answer it. It is, in fact,

a question which is addressed to our own reason and conscience, and which furnishes its own reply. It is, as if the Apostle had said unto us, "Weigh well the wickedness "of these persons. Consider what they are "doing, and what they deserve. Compare "these things with what is written in Scrip-"ture; and then judge how great will be "the punishment, which at length will as-"suredly overtake them." To assist you, then, in coming to a right judgment on this important subject, I shall endeavour to set before you two things:

I. The Sin here specified.

II. Its great and aggravated Guilt.

I. The Sin here specified is not obeying the Gospel of God. The Gospel of God is that gracious message which God hath sent to us by his son Jesus Christ. To obey the Gospel is to receive this message as coming from God; to comply with the terms, and to follow the directions contained in it. On the other hand, *not to obey* the Gospel, is to do the very reverse of this. It is to treat the message with indifference and neglect; to reject the terms, and refuse compliance with the directions which it sets before us. This then, is the Sin here specified. But to give you clearer notions of this Sin, I will describe to you some different sorts of persons who are guilty of it.

Among these, in the first place, are to be ranked all who are living in an irreligious, ungodly manner, careless of their souls, and of eternity, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and walking after the course of this present evil world. It requires not much reasoning to prove, that such persons are guilty of the Sin in the text. The Gospel of God calls on them to repent, and to bring forth fruits meet for repentance. It directs them to turn from their sins, to deny their lusts, and to overcome the world. While, therefore, they continue to act in direct opposition to these injunctions, while their hearts remain hard and sensual, while they serve sin, and follow the multitude to do evil, it is plain, beyond a doubt, that they are not obeying the Gospel of God. Let me, then, admonish all whose consciences tell them that they are persons of this description, seriously to reflect on the matter. You have an intolerable load of sin upon your souls, of numberless transgressions daily committed throughout your life against the holy law of God: but in addition to every other sin, you are chargeable with *this Sin* also. You do not obey the Gospel of God. How great and aggravated is the guilt of this sin, I shall show hereafter. But in the mean time I would strive to fix it in your minds, that this guilt, what-

ever it may be proved to be, is *yours*. You are at present one of the persons spoken of in the text: and so long as you continue one of these, *their* end, whatever it may be, will undoubtedly be *yours*.

A second description of persons, who are chargeable with the Sin in the text, are those who, while they call themselves Christians, yet do not make Jesus Christ and Him crucified the *only* ground of their reconciliation with God, and of their title to eternal life. They do not take Him as their Righteousness; through whose death and obedience *alone* they look for the pardon of sin and peace with God. They have still some confidence in the flesh. They are still trusting to *something* in themselves, in their own works or doings, for their acceptance with God. If Christ be the foundation, He is not the *one only* foundation of all their hopes. Or if they seek to be justified by Him, it is not by *faith only* that they seek it. But acting thus, they do not obey the Gospel of God. They do not comply with the terms, nor follow the directions of it. The very first and chief thing which the Gospel enjoins, is Faith in Christ. It offers us pardon on no other terms but on believing in Him, and receiving Him as the Lord our Righteousness. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "He that be-

lieveth shall be saved." "The righteousness of God," (by which alone the sinner can be justified) "is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe." "We are saved by grace through faith." "Christ is of God made unto us Righteousness;" and so we are "made the Righteousness of God in Him." "Believing in Christ, we are justified from all things." This is God's way of saving sinners. He "justifies them freely by His grace through the Redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom He hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood for the remission of sins." — How came it to pass that the Jews, who followed after righteousness, did not attain to it? For this very reason; they did not seek it in God's way. They "sought it not by Faith, but by the works of the Law." — What was the reason for which St. Paul so severely rebuked the Galatians, telling them that they were fallen from grace, and had been removed into another Gospel, or rather into no Gospel at all? It was this: they had left off seeking to be justified by Faith in Christ, and were seeking justification by the works of the Law. Hence it was that he broke forth into that earnest exclamation, "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that you should not obey the truth*?"

* Gal. iii. 1.

Justification by Faith only in the merits of Christ is so essential a part of the Faith, as it is in Jesus, that to seek Justification in any other way is not to obey the truth; and, consequently, to be guilty of the sin in the text. Would that this point were deeply considered by all who call themselves Christians! It is to be feared that numbers, who claim this title, are greatly deceiving themselves. See, my brethren, that it be not your case. See, that while you pretend to receive the Gospel, you are not virtually rejecting it; that while you profess the hope of being saved by Christ, you are not, in fact, seeking to be justified by the works of the Law. Remember, that if you thus seek it, "Christ is become of no effect unto you." You only "frustrate" (you only make void) "the grace of God." * Whatever you may think in reality, you do not obey the Gospel; and must have your end with the unbelieving and the disobedient.

There is a third sort of persons yet to be noticed, who are equally guilty of not obeying the Gospel of God. They are such as make a show of Religion, and yet do not bring forth the fruits of it. They profess to believe in Jesus Christ; but yet are not careful to maintain good works. They hope to be saved by Him; but they have no de-

* Gal. ii. 21. — v. 4.

sire to be made like Him. They think to share the privileges of Religion, while they neglect its duties. They trust that Christ will deliver them from the wrath to come; but here they have no mind to be His real Disciples. They deny not themselves for His sake. They take not up their Cross and follow Him. They confess Him not before men. They keep not the heart with all diligence, nor labour to cleanse themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and the spirit. Now nothing can be plainer than that such persons do not obey the Gospel of God. For the Gospel of God requires them to do all those things which they leave undone. It bids them to follow after holiness; to bring forth good fruit; to crucify the flesh; to walk in newness of life; to grow in grace; to have the mind which was in Jesus Christ; to let their light shine before men. Consider these things, all ye who profess to know God, but in works deny Him; who, calling yourselves Christians, yet seek not after inward purity; who are satisfied at the most with lopping off some of the branches, and lay not the axe to the root of the tree; who, notwithstanding your pretended hope in Christ, remain proud, or covetous, or sensual, or worldly, or passionate, or envious, or uncharitable; who still love Mammon more than Christ, or pleasure

more than God; who readily seize every opportunity of gratifying your favourite sin; or if you deny one lust, only do it that you may more easily indulge another.—Consider all ye, who answer to any part of this description, that you are equally guilty with the others before mentioned, of the sin specified in the text. You obey not the Gospel of God. This is your sin. I proceed,

II. To set before you its great and aggravated Guilt. This is a point but little regarded and understood. Even those, who may have some tolerably correct views of other sins, have yet frequently very unequal conceptions of this. They think but lightly of the Sin of rejecting the Gospel. In disobeying the Gospel, they do not seem to think that they are doing any thing which will increase their guilt. But let us hear what Christ himself has said on this point. "He that believeth not is condemned already; *because* he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God." * The not obeying the Gospel, or, which is the same thing, the want of Faith in Jesus Christ, is expressly assigned as the *cause* and the *ground* of condemnation. In fact, this sin which men esteem so light, or which they think no sin at all, is the worst and the greatest sin of which any man can be guilty.

* John, iii. 18.

It is that sin, which in guilt exceeds all other sins; and will sink those who are guilty of it into the deepest condemnation. Does this assertion surprise you? I will endeavour to convince you of its truth.

Men are apt to measure the evil of sin by the immediate consequences which flow from it. They deem *that sin* to be the greatest, which does the most injury to themselves or others. But this is not the standard by which the degree of guilt is to be regulated. For the evil of sin does not lie in the injury which is done to man, but in the injury which is done to God. The circumstance which makes sin so evil is, that it is committed against God. It is a breach of His law; an offence against His government; an affront offered to His majesty. Would we know, then, the evil of any particular sin, and the degree of guilt which attaches to it, we must consider it in reference to God. In this light let us consider the sin of which we are speaking, and we shall then see how great and aggravated is its guilt.

In the first place, the Gospel is the *Gospel of God.* It is that gracious message, which the Almighty himself hath sent to us, to us His creatures, the work of His hands, the daily dependants on His bounty for life, and breath, and all things. What, then, can be more affronting to God than not to obey

the Gospel? God has sent us a message, and shall we refuse to listen to it? Hath God spoken, and shall we turn a deaf ear to what He says?

Consider further, *by Whom* He hath sent this message to us. It was not a common messenger that He has employed. It was not a man like ourselves. It was not an angel even of the highest order. No. It was One, who was high above all angels. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the Fathers by the Prophets, hath in these last times spoken unto us by his Son;" that Son, "whom He hath appointed heir of all things; by whom also he made the worlds;" and who, we profess to believe, will come to be our Judge. Surely the dignity of the Messenger greatly increases our obligation to listen to his message, and our guilt in rejecting it. Hath not God a right to expect that we should reverence his Son? Hath He not a right to expect that we should attend to Him, who came from Heaven to speak to us; and whom he hath commanded us by a voice from Heaven to hear? "This is my beloved Son: hear ye *Him*," What greater insult can we offer to God than to shut our ears against such a messenger?

Consider, again, what is the *purport of this*

Message. It is a message of mercy; of mercy the most gracious to sinners, to enemies, to rebels. The Gospel is the Gospel of Peace. It brings to us glad tidings of great joy. It makes known to us that way of salvation, which God, in his infinite wisdom and goodness, has provided for our fallen and guilty race. It teaches us how we may be reconciled to Him, and recovered out of that state of guilt and misery into which sin has plunged us. To refuse, then, to listen to this message, not to obey this Gospel, is to pour contempt on the rich mercy of God. It is to show that we despise his offers, value not his favour, and desire not to be at peace with Him. How then can we more pointedly declare the enmity of our hearts to God, than by such a conduct? How can we more grossly offend, insult, and sin against Him?

Consider once again what is *that wonderful mystery of Love*, which the Gospel discloses to us. When God had planned a salvation for us, as it was not any common messenger which He sent to tell us of it, so neither was it any common way in which He prepared it for us. That same Son who came to make known to us his Father's will, came also Himself to perform that will. He came to suffer and to die in our stead, and for our sins. He came to be a sacrifice for

us, to shed his own blood for us on the cross, that by his stripes we might be healed, that by his sufferings our peace with God might be made. This was the price of our redemption, the precious blood of Him, who was God as well as man. What love must He have had for sinners to redeem them at such a price? How great must have been his compassion for our lost and miserable state, that while we were yet enemies, He should be content to die for us! And how aggravated, then, how immensely great must be the guilt of rejecting such a Saviour; of returning enmity for so much love; of refusing to submit to Him, who laid down his life for us! Not to obey the Gospel, is, in fact, to crucify the Son of God afresh, to put him to death a second time. And what wickedness can be greater than this? Who can conceive the ingratitude and the guilt of such a conduct?

Having thus set before you the two points which I proposed, let me now remind you of the Apostle's question in the text, "What shall *the End* be of them that obey not the Gospel of God?" What will become of those persons of whom we have been speaking? What do you yourselves think will be their End? Having seen the great and aggravated guilt with which they are chargeable, are you not in your own conscience

convinced that their End will be dreadful; so dreadful that it would have been good for them never to have been born? In truth, though St. Peter does not himself answer the question in the text; yet St. Paul furnishes us with the most plain and explicit reply to it. He expressly says, in his second Epistle to the Thessalonians *, that "the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ," (take notice of the words, 'that *obey not the Gospel* of our Lord Jesus Christ,') "who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power." — How, indeed, can it be otherwise? If God be, as He certainly is, the Just Avenger of Sin, what vengeance must He not have in store for the greatest of all sins, for the punishment of his most incorrigible enemies; of those whom neither threatening could subdue, nor mercy soften; of those who would not obey his Gospel; who slighted his message, despised his love, and crucified his Son? From the vengeance reserved for such sinners, may the Lord deliver us! May we never know it by experience. But may

* 2 Thess. i. 7, 8, 9.

He so dispose and prepare our heart, that we may now take timely warning, and may flee from the wrath to come!

My brethren, what is the great aim of all which has been said to you, or can ever be said to you on this subject, but that you may be stirred up to a deeper and more lively concern for your immortal souls? Why is the Gospel preached to you, but that you may obey it, and be saved? Why was the blood of Jesus shed, but that you, by receiving him, may escape eternal condemnation? May the Holy Spirit of God incline you to lay these things seriously to heart, and to attend with earnestness to the One Thing needful! May He take of the things of Christ, and show them unto you! May He stir you up to seek his salvation, and to obey his Gospel.—Then will *your* End be glorious. Then, when the unbelieving and the disobedient shall be overwhelmed with everlasting shame and misery, *you* shall shine forth as the stars in the firmament, and shall be blessed for ever and ever.

Yes; such will be the glorious, the triumphant End of all those who now obey the Gospel of God, who, having fled for refuge to the Lord Jesus Christ, and daily depending on His grace and promise for pardon, wisdom, and strength, "are now living the life which they live in the flesh, by the faith

of the Son of God," and are bringing forth fruit to his praise and glory. There is a salvation prepared for *them:* even the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. "There is an inheritance reserved for *them*, even an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." When the world, with all its fleeting riches, pleasures, and honours, shall have passed away for ever, *they* will be put in possession of a treasure, a joy, a glory, which will be substantial, and everlasting. My brethren, set before you this glorious End. Contemplate that crown of righteousness which, though invisible to human sight, and disregarded by the carnal mind, is revealed to the eye of faith, and realized to the believing soul. Contemplate it with seriousness, with attention, with steadfastness. See the heavens opened, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, ready to receive your departing spirit. Hear these gracious words proceeding out of his lips, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." — Set these things, I say, before you. Realize them by faith: and derive from the contemplation of them all the encouragement and all the consolation, all the motives to patience, to exertion, and to renewed obedience, which they are so fully calculated to inspire. Is the way of Religion

a narrow way; is it thorny, difficult, painful? Bear in mind the End to which it leads. Are you called to suffer for righteousness' sake; to endure reproach, opposition, or hard usage, from the world, because you belong to Christ? Have respect unto the recompense of reward. Are you harassed with trials and temptations; afflicted with sickness or poverty; neglected, forsaken, oppressed? Set before you that Rest, which remaineth for the people of God. Let none of these things move you, so that you may finish your course with joy. Be patient; be diligent: "not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises." In due time you shall reap, if you faint not. Be faithful unto death, and you shall receive a crown of life. Above all things, my brethren, pray for wisdom and strength from heaven. Ever remember how ignorant and weak you are in yourselves. Without help from above you will neither know what you ought to do, nor will you have courage and ability to perform it. Pray then for grace continually. Be earnest and instant in supplication. Seek to walk more closely and humbly with Jesus Christ. Be more simply dependant on His Spirit. Be more entirely directed by His Word. Be more decidedly devoted to His service. So shall you more truly obey the

Gospel of God. So shall your End more assuredly be glorious. "So shall an entrance be ministered unto you more abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

SERMON VIII.

SAVING FAITH THROUGH THE WORD.

JOHN, xvii. 20.

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word.

THESE words are taken from that memorable Prayer, which our Lord offered up on the evening before his Crucifixion, and which can never be contemplated without feelings of the liveliest interest, and of the most devout admiration. These feelings are especially heightened by the consideration that this Prayer is probably designed as a pattern of that intercession, which He is still carrying on at the right hand of God, as well as a statement of those blessings for which He is continually praying in behalf of those who are the objects of his mediation. On an attentive reading of the Prayer, we shall find these Blessings chiefly to consist in a present deliverance and preservation from the evil that is in the World;

in progressive Sanctification; in Communion and Fellowship with the Father; in Love and Union with one another; and in final and complete Glorification with himself in Heaven. And who were the objects of this Intercession? Who were the persons for whom the Redeemer of the world thus prayed? Was it for the Apostles, for those whom the Father had given Him out of the world; who had received his word, and believed that the Father had sent him; was it for those that He supplicated these Blessings? Yes: for those: but not for those only; not for those exclusively; but for all such as should ever hereafter become his true Disciples. This is the point which is directly asserted in the text. We might have apprehended that these favoured individuals were the only persons for whom this Prayer was offered. But for ever to preclude such an apprehension, our Lord expressly says, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word." As if he had thus more fully expressed himself. 'Though these my twelve 'Disciples, whom, the Son of Perdition ex-'cepted, I am about to send as my Apostles 'into the world, may in some respects have 'a peculiar interest in this Prayer; yet I 'design not that the general Blessings in-'voked in it, should be limited to them. I

'pray that they may be extended to all
'those, who in every station and condition
'of life, in every age or country of the
'world, may be brought to believe on Me
'through their word.' — And what again are we to understand by this Word? Are we to restrict it to the Word which they *preached?* Thus to restrict it, would be to limit the Benefits of Christ's Intercession to the generation in which the Apostles lived. It is evident that the Word which they *wrote*, was equally intended by our Lord: for it was only through *this* Word that the blessings of his mediation could be extended to future and distant generations. Nor indeed is the expression, by parity of reason, to be limited even to the Word written by the *Apostles*, it must be understood equally to comprehend the writings of *the other inspired Penmen*, both of the Old and of the New Testament: all of whom "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," and were inspired and guided by the same Spirit; all of whom testified, more or less distinctly, of the same truths; and spake, though in different terms adapted to the different dispensations under which they lived, of the same Salvation. In short, the Word mentioned in the text includes, directly or indirectly, the whole Word of God. We may understand it to signify generally the Scriptures: all of which were

" given by inspiration of God, and are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in Righteousness."

Such appears to be the meaning of the passage: and from the passage thus explained I purpose to deduce two propositions.

I. That the benefits of Christ's Mediation are limited to those who believe on Him.

II. That the Scriptures are the Medium through which this Belief is produced.

These two propositions I shall endeavour to confirm and illustrate: and may that Blessed Spirit, who alone can lead us into all truth, graciously assist us in a discussion, from which conclusions so important and interesting will evidently result!

I. That the benefits of Christ's Mediation are limited to those who believe on Him is plain, as we have seen, from this single and striking consideration; that in the very passage of this intercessory Prayer in which He designs expressly to set forth the wide and comprehensive exercise of his Mediation, He yet, in most positive terms, confines it within this limitation: that at the very moment, in which he would obviate the supposition of its being partial and exclusive in its operation, he yet most decidedly restricts that operation to those *who shall believe on*

Him. Nor was this the first, or the only occasion, in which He stated and maintained the same Truth. In fact, it was but a repetition and confirmation of the Doctrine which he had uniformly taught. He had always represented belief in Himself as an indispensable qualification in those who would be saved by Him. To Nicodemus He had said, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever *believeth* in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "He that *believeth* on Him is not condemned; but he that *believeth* not is condemned already, because he hath not *believed* in the name of the only-begotten Son of God." To Martha He had said, "I am the Resurrection and the Life: he that *believeth* on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and he that liveth, and *believeth* on me, shall never die." To the Jews He had said, "This is the will of Him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and *believeth* on Him, shall have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." And after his resurrection from the dead, He still held the same language; and in the commission which He gave to His Apostles, strongly asserted this fundamental principle of His religion: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature: He

that *believeth* and is baptized shall be saved." — What, in fact, is the universal language of Scripture on this subject, but a repetition of the same truths? Let us hearken to the testimony of John the Baptist, "who came for a witness, to bear witness of the light, that all men through Him might believe. "He that *believeth* on the Son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on Him." Let us listen to the declaration of St. Paul. "*Believe* on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved:" and to that of St. John, "This is His commandment, that we should *believe* on the Name of his Son Jesus Christ." — And the same language, which is thus used in respect to salvation in general, is equally used in respect to the particular and separate branches of it. Every individual blessing of the Gospel, every single fruit of Christ's Intercession, is uniformly represented as a consequence inseparably united with the act of *believing* on Him. Is it pardon of sin? "To Him give all the Prophets witness, that through His name, whosoever *believeth* on Him shall receive remission of sins." Is it Justification? "By Him, all that *believe* are justified from all things." And again, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that *believeth*." Is

it adoption? "As many as received Him to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that *believe* on His name." Is it sanctification? Those that are sanctified are said to be "sanctified in *Christ Jesus.*" Their hearts are "purified by *faith:*" they are "sanctified by *faith,* that is in Christ Jesus." Is it spiritual support and strength? "He that *believeth* on Him shall not be confounded." Is it spiritual light and knowledge? "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever *believeth* on me, should not abide in darkness." Is it spiritual peace and joy? "Now the God of hope fill you with all peace and joy in *believing.*" But there is no occasion to multiply texts on a subject, on which they might be multiplied without end. Those already produced are sufficient for our present purpose. With one voice they confirm the proposition under review. With one voice they bear witness to the inseparable union between Faith and Salvation, between a belief in Christ and an interest in His mediation. With one voice they proclaim that the benefits of His intercession are limited to those who believe on Him. I proceed, then,

II. To the other Proposition deduced from the text; namely, that the Scriptures

are the Medium through which this belief is produced.

The same consideration which showed the first Proposition to be true, proves the truth of this second also: for if our Lord Jesus Christ, in stating the extent of his intercession, has restricted the benefits of it to those who should believe on Him, and who should believe *through the word* of his Apostles, it is plain, from the explanation already given of the text, that the Scriptures are the Medium, through which a saving belief in Him is produced. By this restriction He has, in fact, assigned to them this office. And is not this the office which St. Paul assigns to them, when he says, that "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God?" And does not St. John ascribe to them the same office, when he says, that, "These things were written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, ye might have life through his name?" * — But *how do* they perform this office? *How* do the Scriptures produce faith? They produce it in two ways.

1st. Inasmuch as they are the *Foundation* on which it is built.

"Faith," according to the Apostle, "is

* Romans, x. 17. — John, x. 31.

the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."* In other words, that belief, of which we are speaking as necessary to salvation, is such a firm persuasion in the mind of the reality and excellence of things, which have not been submitted to the outward senses, as convinces the judgment, and engages and influences the heart. But from this description it is evident, that such a belief supposes a certain degree of previous information and knowledge; for without some information respecting the things in question, how can there be any persuasion of their reality and excellence? To believe then in Jesus Christ, and in the efficacy of his Mediation, implies that we have a certain degree of previous knowledge on these subjects. And where is this knowledge to be obtained; where is the previous information respecting Christ and His salvation to be procured, but from the Scriptures? The Scriptures are the only source of divine information and knowledge. Here only are we taught the way of salvation. Here only are we instructed in the knowledge of those things, "which pertain to life and godliness." Here only is Jesus Christ set forth evidently crucified before our eyes. Here only is He exhibited to us as the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin

* Hebrews, xi. 1.

of the world; as the High-Priest of our profession, who is passed into the Heavens, and ever liveth to make intercession for us. Here only are life and immortality brought to light. Here only are disclosed to us those exceeding great and precious promises, by which we may be made partakers of the divine nature. No wit or wisdom of man could ever have penetrated into these mysteries, or have discovered to us the knowledge of them. They are matters of pure revelation, and are made known to us only by the word of God. Neither have they been handed down through the uncertainty of human tradition. They have been preserved and are secured to us in the written oracles of truth, in the Holy Scriptures; which being the only depository of divine knowledge, can be the only *Foundation* of saving Faith. In this respect they produce Faith. They produce it,

2dly. Inasmuch as they are the *Instrument* by which it is wrought in the heart.

That Faith, of which we are speaking, and to which alone the Blessings of Christ's Mediation are restricted, is itself the gift and operation of God. It is the work and production of the Holy Spirit in the heart. It is one of the most valuable fruits, one of the most important effects, of that new and holy nature, which in regeneration He

imparts to the soul. But the *great Instrument* by which He works and operates, is the written Word. This is the instrument, which, when commissioned and employed by the Spirit of God, becomes "quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow:" and which is, therefore, emphatically styled "the Sword of the Spirit." This is the instrument, by which He accomplishes the great work of our regeneration itself; for it is expressly said by St. Peter, that we are "*born again*, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, *by the word of God*, which liveth and abideth for ever:" and again by St. James, "of his own will *begat He us by the word of truth*." Hence, by the same instrument, He produces Faith in the heart. Blessed with His quickening energy, the Word "comes with power," and "effectually worketh in them that believe." To what other cause can we ascribe it, that the three thousand on the day of Pentecost believed and embraced the Gospel, but to the powerful and quickening energy with which the Holy Spirit accompanied the preaching of the Apostle, and thus through the medium and instrumentality of the Word produced a divine faith in the hearts of those who heard it? Does not St. Paul call the Gospel which

he preached "the word of Faith," as being that word by which Faith is produced and strengthened in the heart? Does not Christ say to the Jews, "Ye have not His word abiding in you; for whom he hath sent, Him ye believe not?" thereby intimating, that if the Word of God had abode in them, it would have produced Faith. Their not believing, was a proof that the Word did not abide in them. It could not abide in them, and they at the same time remain destitute of Faith.

Having thus endeavoured to confirm and illustrate the two propositions deduced from the text, I shall proceed to make a practical application of the truths contained in them.

1. Has Christ limited the benefits of His mediation to those who *believe* on Him? Is this really the case? Does He confine His intercession, even in its most extended application, to *believers* in Him? How strikingly does this truth show the importance of Faith! How clearly does it point out the wide distinction between believers and unbelievers! Ministers are often censured for insisting on this distinction. They are blamed for stating the importance and necessity of saving Faith. But has not Christ Himself stated this importance, this necessity? Has not He insisted on this distinction? While He prays exclusively for those who believe

on Him, does He not virtually shut out from the benefits of His intercession, those who believe not? Surely this is to point out a wide and most important difference between belief and unbelief. When we declare that a man must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ in order to be saved; do we declare more than Jesus Christ Himself has declared? Do we declare more than His Apostles have declared? More than the Scriptures throughout declare? No. We declare no more than all these declare, and less we dare not to declare. We preach to you Faith — Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ — as that one great, essential principle, the absence, or the presence, the want or the possession of which constitutes the grand distinguishing difference in the state and characters of men. Those who have this Faith, are the children of God, and have an interest in all the blessings of the Gospel, in all those great and glorious privileges, which the intercession of Christ procures. While those who are without this Faith, are at enmity with God, belong not to His family, are under the curse of His law, and have neither part nor lot in the Gospel. We preach to you this faith as the bond of union with Christ; the foundation of all good works; the only source of all practical godliness. We preach to you this Faith, as a living seed in the soul, not a

dead, a cold, a barren notion in the head, but a vital, a warm, a powerful principle in the heart, impelling to active, spiritual obedience, and naturally, yea necessarily productive of the fruits of righteousness and true holiness. This is the faith we preach; a saving, justifying, sanctifying Faith: a Faith, which adorns, enriches, and ennobles all who have it; but without which the proudest distinctions of rank and wealth, the highest attainments in learning and science, the most orthodox notions of religion, the most correct form of it, the most zealous profession of it, will leave men at last only poor, wretched, and contemptible, beyond all possible conception.

2. Are the Scriptures the *Medium* through which this Faith is produced? Do those who believe on Jesus Christ, believe *through the Word?* Is this proposition also true? Is it true in two respects? Is the Word the *Foundation* on which Faith is built, as well as the *Instrument* by which it is wrought? In both these respects, then, how important is the Word of God! How invaluable are the Scriptures! And what a powerful and practical influence should this consideration of their importance and value have on the use which we make of them, and on the purposes to which we apply them!

Is the Word of God the *Foundation* on

which Faith is built? Is it from the Scriptures only that we can derive the knowledge of those great truths, the belief of which is essential to our salvation? Then how thankful should we be to God for this inestimable gift of His Word! How desirous should we be of possessing this sacred treasure! When possessed of it, how diligent should we be in the perusal of it! How incessantly should we draw water from these wells of salvation! With what care and anxiety should we labour to become acquainted with the contents of the Bible! With what attention should we read it in our houses! With what readiness should we embrace the opportunity afforded us of hearing it publicly preached or expounded! The injunctions given to the Israelites on this subject are, in the spirit of them equally binding upon us under the Christian dispensation. "These words which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates." In this passage, indeed, the study of the Scrip-

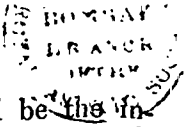
tures is enjoined as a duty: but let us remember that it is a duty enjoined on us for our own good; a duty, the performance of which is closely connected with our own interest, yea, absolutely necessary to our real and everlasting happiness. — Search then the Scriptures, for they testify of Christ; and they, and they only, "are able to save your soul."

Nor do the practical consequences which result from the truth before us end here. They terminate not with ourselves; they reach to others also. The consideration that the Bible is the *foundation* of all saving Christian Faith, should excite in us an ardent desire, not only of possessing and studying this Blessed Book, but of communicating it to others also; and thus of furnishing them with the means of obtaining like precious faith with ourselves. The dispersion of the Scriptures, so far as we have it in our power to disperse them, is a duty highly incumbent on us as Christians: it is a debt of gratitude which we owe to our Redeemer: it is a debt of love which we owe to our fellow-creatures. Nor can that person be duly awakened to a sense of his proper obligations, who does not feel an ardent desire of imparting, not only to his friends and relations, not only to his neighbours and acquaintance, not only to his fel-

low-churchmen, or fellow-countrymen, but to every individual of the human race, whether Jew, Turk, Infidel, or Heretic, a copy of that heavenly volume, which alone is "able to make him wise unto salvation." How ready then should we be to take a part in promoting this good and glorious work! How thankful should we be for every opportunity vouchsafed to us of promoting it! With what cordiality should we give our mite, our wishes and our prayers in support of that noble society, which has lately sprung up among us, the glory and ornament of our native land; that Society, whose only object is to disseminate throughout the earth the Word of Life; and through whose exertions it may be reasonably hoped, that in due time the saving Truths of the Gospel will go forth into all lands, and their words into the end of the world.

But, lastly, are the Scriptures not only the Foundation on which Faith is built, but also the *Instrument* by which it is wrought? How powerfully should this consideration operate on our minds and conduct! Let us remember, my brethren, when we read or hear the word of God, when we study it at home, or listen to it abroad, that though we thus attain to a *knowledge* of the truths to be believed, yet the *actual believing* of them must be the effect of a divine oper-

ation on our hearts. We may hear, and read, and know, and understand, and yet at the same time not *really believe*. Nor shall we ever *thus* believe, unless the Spirit of God accompanies the word, and disposes and enables the heart to receive it in faith and love. Let us further remember, that the Word of God is the appointed instrument by which the Spirit accomplishes this gracious work; by which He reaches the heart, and produces in it true and living Faith. According to the terms and promises of the covenant of grace, the ministration of the Spirit is annexed to that of the Word, that so our Faith "may not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." Let us, I say, remember these things, and bear them in mind, and act accordingly. Let us study the Bible with the *view*, with the *hope*, not only of obtaining *Divine Knowledge*, but also of procuring *Divine Faith*: of getting it first implanted, and then strengthened in our soul. In our use of the Scriptures let us humbly hope for a *Divine Impression* on our heart. Let us earnestly pray that the Spirit of God will give life and energy to the Word, and will cause it effectually to work in us, that we may truly believe to the saving of our soul. If such were the hopes and prayers with which the Bible was generally opened, and the House



of God attended, great would be the increase of true Religion to be witnessed, abundant the spiritual harvest to be reaped. May the Lord hasten it in his time! May *we*, my brethren, so read and hear his holy Word, that it may be mixed with faith in our hearts! May we so believe in Jesus Christ, whom God hath sent, that at His second coming we may be found among that blessed company, for whom on earth He prayed, "Father, I will that they whom Thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory!"

SERMON IX.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CHRIST'S PEACE AND THE WORLD'S PEACE.

JOHN, xiv. 27.

Peace I leave with you; my Peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you.

THE Peace of which Christ here speaks, is inward peace, peace of conscience: a mind at peace with God and with itself: that "peace of God," as the Scriptures call it, "which passeth all understanding." This is the blessing which Christ bestows on his Church. It is the legacy, which He has left to his people. "Peace I leave with you." It is also, in a peculiar sense, *His* peace, as being His purchase and His work; bought *for* us by his blood, and wrought *in* us by his Spirit. "My Peace I give unto you." But there is nothing by which the distinctive excellence of this Peace is more strongly marked, than by its great unlikeness to that peace which the world bestows upon its fol-

lowers. For the world, like religion, has a peace of its own, a peace peculiar to itself; a peace, however, which in fact does not deserve the name, and essentially differs from the peace of the Gospel. This difference our Lord might probably intend to notice in the text, when He says, "Not as the world giveth, give I unto you." The peace which I give, is not the peace which the world gives. It is very unlike to it; it is very different from it, and in many respects the very reverse of it.

It is this Difference between the peace of Christ, and the peace of the world, which I purpose to make the subject of the present discourse. God grant, that the consideration of it may be profitable to us, by stirring up our hearts to seek true peace, where only it can be really found, even in Jesus Christ!

There are three points wherein the Difference, of which we are speaking, may be clearly and distinctly traced.

I. The two kinds of Peace which we are comparing with each other are totally different in their *foundation* and *origin*. The one is founded on ignorance: the other on knowledge. If worldly men are at peace, it is because their eyes are blinded; because they see not and know not, and are in darkness. But true Christians derive *their* peace

from a very contrary source. They have peace because their eyes are open; because they see and know, and are in the light. I will explain this matter further.

Men who are walking according to the course of this world, in the lust of the flesh, in the lust of the eye, or in the pride of life, may be free from all distressing fears about the condition of their soul. They may not feel any uneasiness at the thoughts of a judgment to come. Their consciences may give them no alarm. They may even think themselves safe, and entertain no doubt of their final salvation.—And this state of fancied security is that, which we mean by the peace of the world. But now whence does this state of mind arise? How comes it to pass, that persons who are living in ungodliness and sin, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and consequently daily exposed to everlasting condemnation, should possess this security, and enjoy this peace? The reason is plain. They are ignorant of their danger. The God of this world has blinded their eyes that they cannot see. Their souls are all darkness within. They have no knowledge of God: that is, no right and true apprehensions of Him, as a just and holy Being, who is of purer eyes than to look upon iniquity, and will by no means clear the guilty. They know nothing

of their own guilt. They see not the number, the greatness, the malignity of their sins. They are ignorant of that holy law of God, which reaches to the thoughts and intents of the heart, and requires truth in the inward parts. — Hence springs *their* peace. This is the *foundation* on which it stands, the source from which it originates.

See on the other hand what is the *foundation* on which Christians build their peace. They know all those things, of which worldly men are ignorant. The eyes of their mind have been opened. They have seen the true character of God, the spiritual nature of the divine law, and their own exceeding sinfulness and guilt. At first, perhaps, the sight of these things might occasion some uneasiness, and might create in them many fears. But this uneasiness is now removed. These fears are allayed. Peace is established in their soul. And how did they attain to it? By looking unto Jesus Christ. The same mercy, which has led them to see their sins, has led them also to see their Saviour dying for those sins, and by his death taking them away for ever. And this sight has quieted their fears. They have seen Jesus, who delivers from the wrath to come, "of God made unto them righteousness," set forth as a propitiation for their sins; and thus looking unto Him, they have found rest unto

their soul. "Being justified by faith, they have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." — Such is the *foundation* of *their* peace.

And from this view then of the subject, we may see how widely the peace of Christ differs from the peace of the world. The peace of the world is the peace of a sleeping, of a stupified, of a hardened conscience. They who have this peace, cannot give any reason *why* they have it. They cannot *account* for the security which they feel. They cannot say *whence* it comes, or *on what grounds* they have any pretensions to it. But the peace of Christ is the peace of an enlightened, of an awakened, of a tender conscience. The Christian not only has peace, but can tell *why* he has it. He "can give a *reason* of the hope that is in him." He knows "whom he has believed." He can say with a conscious experience of the truth of his words, 'Christ is my Peace. I 'look to Jesus Christ, and to him crucified. 'I believe on Him, and am filled with Peace 'in believing.'

My brethren, are there not some of you, who can bear witness to these things? Who have yourselves felt both these kinds of peace; and knowing, by your own experience, what they are, can testify to the truth of this representation? The time has been

when you were in a state of stupid unconcern about your soul and eternal things. You felt nothing, you thought nothing to any good purpose, on the subject of religion. Troubled and cumbered about many things, you were wholly regardless of the one thing needful. At the same time your conscience gave you no uneasiness; and you felt yourself in a state of peace. But it has pleased God, in his great mercy, to awaken you from this aweful sleep. Your eyes have been opened You have been brought out of darkness into marvellous light. The Lord by His Word and by His Spirit quickened you when dead in trespasses and sins. Your mind became enlightened. Your conscience became alarmed. Your false peace was destroyed. And through the same divine mercy, a new peace has been revealed to you. You have found this peace in Jesus Christ. Fleeing from the wrath to come, you have sought refuge in the promises of the Gospel, and have found rest unto your soul. In Christ you have found a real, an abiding peace: a peace which passeth knowledge; a peace of which you once had no conception; but a peace which you now know by heartfelt experience, and which you would not be tempted to exchange for every thing which this world could offer you in return. Is not this the case? Is not the Peace which you now have

in Christ Jesus as different from that Peace which you once had in the world, as light is from darkness, as health is from sickness? — Prize then this inestimable gift, this precious legacy. Remember *whose* gift, *whose* legacy it is; the *price* at which it was purchased; the *friend* by whom it was bequeathed; and render the praise and the thanks and the glory to Him, to whom they are so justly due.

II. The two kinds of Peace, which we are comparing together, are totally different in their *present effects*. The peace which the world gives, being founded in ignorance, and consisting with a state of sin, leaves a man still enslaved to his lusts and appetites, nor puts him on any endeavour to free himself from this miserable bondage. Checked by no fear, he follows without restraint the devices and desires of his own heart. Disturbed by no doubts or apprehensions, he pursues whatever course his natural inclination leads him to prefer. Whether his favourite and besetting sin be pride, or ambition, or covetousness, or sensuality; be it what it may, he indulges it with greediness, while at the same time he is crying, Peace, Peace, to himself. But how widely different in this respect is the Peace which Christ gives to his people! This is a Peace, which, being the fruit of faith and the work of

grace, is accompanied with a sanctifying influence, that frees and purifies the heart from sin. The man who experiences this blessed Peace, cannot but seek to be delivered from the power and pollution of sin. In fact, this is a Peace which cannot subsist with a state of sin. It cannot subsist with the practice of any known transgression of the law of God, with the allowed indulgence of any irregular desire: for such a practice, such an allowed indulgence, would at once interrupt and destroy it. Let us remember that this Peace is a Peace founded on knowledge, on reflection, on a solid, scriptural hope of our being at peace with God through Jesus Christ. But how can this hope be formed or maintained, unless at the same time there be also a consciousness, that nothing is practised or allowed, which is forbidden by God, or displeasing to him? Without such a consciousness, the hope itself cannot stand; and consequently the Peace, which must be founded on it, cannot exist. St. John declares, that "every one who has this *hope* in him *purifies* himself even as Christ is pure." And the same may be said of the Peace of the Gospel: Every one who has this Peace, purifies himself. It is a Peace which produces the most glorious fruits, purity, holiness, and righteousness.

And here again may I not appeal to the experience of some who hear me? You, who have tasted that the Lord is gracious; who have been brought to feel something of that real peace, of which we are speaking; say, what do you know on this subject? Cannot you testify, that such are the blessed effects of being at peace with God through Jesus Christ? Formerly you could promise yourselves peace in the ways of sin. You could break God's law with little remorse, or at the most with some transitory uneasiness. You could live in the habitual indulgence of vicious appetites, of evil tempers, of worldly affections, and not feel either shame or fear. You could presumptuously "bless yourself in your heart, and say, I shall have peace though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, and add drunkenness to thirst." — But is it so now? My brethren, if I know any thing of your hearts and feelings, it is not. Now that you have been taught to know the truth as it is in Jesus, you have learned to fear sin; to avoid it; to renounce it; to flee from it. You cannot now do as you once did. You cannot now allow yourselves in the practice of what you perceive to be sinful. I know indeed that you are far from being perfect, neither have you already attained. I know that so long as you are in the flesh, and carry about with you a body

of sin, sinful desires, and evil passions, are not, and will not be altogether rooted out of your heart. You find and feel them there. But you now lament that they *are* there. You do not wilfully indulge them. You resist and deny them; and earnestly pray and strive to have them utterly subdued and mortified. You know by experience that to give place to them, is the sure way to wound your conscience, and to interrupt your comfort. You find by daily trial that "to be spiritually minded is life and peace:" that the more closely and more humbly you can walk with God, the stronger is your confidence towards Him, and the greater your happiness in Him. Go on then in this blessed path. Fight the good fight of faith. See that Self be more denied, and sin more subdued. Follow after righteousness; and you will find that promise fulfilled to you, "The work of righteousness shall be Peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever."

III. The two kinds of Peace, which we are comparing together, differ also in another very important respect, namely, in their *End*. Here the difference between the Peace which Christ gives, and the Peace which the world gives, is indeed most striking. The Peace which the world gives, is at

best only for a season. The time is coming when it must perish for ever. Founded, as it is, on ignorance, and consisting, as it does, with a state of sin, it cannot reach beyond this life. In another world it must come utterly to an end for evermore. Suppose that a man is now living in ease and tranquillity. Suppose him to be under no care or anxiety about his soul. He either thinks not at all of its concerns; or presumptuously flatters himself that it is safe. Intent only on present gratifications, he follows his own devices, and goes on in the way of his own heart, and promises to himself, that to-morrow shall be as this day, or much more abundant. Suppose, I say, that a man is in this state; yet how long will it last? It *can* last no longer than life lasts. Then the fatal deception, the miserable delusion *must* end. Then the veil will be torn from his eyes. Then he will no longer continue ignorant of those things, which he has hitherto refused to know. The dreadful evil of sin, the awful punishment prepared for it, the wrath of an offended God — those weighty, those momentous truths, which he here regarded as fables or fancies, will then appear to him most substantial, most dreadful realities. He will then see himself to be a guilty sinner, compelled to stand before the judgment-seat of God, and stripped of every excuse.

And what has become of the Peace which he once had? It is fled, it is lost for ever. He will never know Peace again. He will have no rest day nor night. He will go into everlasting punishment, where his worm will "never die, and the fire will never be quenched."

Would it might be, my brethren, that all of *you*, who are now lulled asleep by this world's Peace, would lay these things seriously to heart! You are now, it may be, at ease. You feel no guilt. You fear no danger. You think, if you think at all, that you are in safety, and will do well at the last. But awake, I beseech you, from this ruinous slumber. You are *not* in safety. You will *nct* do well at the last. Look forward to the time, when this dream will end; when your eyes will be opened, and you will awake to shame and everlasting contempt. God himself has declared, that "there is no peace to the wicked;" and while you are living careless about your souls, *you* are wicked. The Peace, then, which you seem to have, is no peace, no real peace. It is only that aweful calm, which precedes and portends the heavier storm. Awake, I entreat you, from this state. Awake now; lest you should only awake, when it shall be too late, on the bed of death, or in another world; when you

shall knock, but knock in vain, for entrance; when you shall begin to lament with fruitless cries and tears your folly and your hardness of heart; when you shall be left without one ray of hope to cheer your gloomy prospect; without one drop of water to cool your burning tongue. Such is the *End* of this World's Peace.

But far different is the end of that Peace which Christ bestows. He gives not as the World. This Peace, the Peace with which He gladdens the hearts of his people, is a Peace which will last for ever. There will be no end thereof. Instead of failing and forsaking a man at that time when he wants it most, it will then be most strong, most present, most abiding. It will comfort him in sickness. It will cheer him in death. It will follow him into eternity. There it will be turned into joy unspeakable, into bliss most glorious. That hope, which has here been its chief support, will there be fully realised. No disappointment will be felt. Every promise will be abundantly fulfilled. Every expectation will be more than answered. Whatever may have here disturbed or interrupted the enjoyment of this peace, will there cease entirely and for ever. Sin will trouble no more. The world will trouble no more. All tears shall be wiped from the eyes. All anxiety will be removed from

the heart; and sorrow and sighing shall flee away for ever.—This is the *End* of Christian Peace, of that Peace, which the World cannot give, and which even now it cannot take away; of that Peace, which Christ has purchased by his blood, and has bequeathed as a legacy to his Church.—Ye who now possess this Peace; Ye, who know what it is to be at peace with God through Jesus Christ, rejoice and be exceedingly glad. Having found this Peace, you have found indeed a pearl of great price. Strive then to maintain it. Labour to acquire a richer enjoyment, a livelier experience of it. Walk more closely and more humbly with your God and Saviour. Devote yourselves more entirely to his service and glory. So shall your "Peace increase like a river." You shall have all joy and peace in believing. You shall live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you.

SERMON X.

CONVERSION FROM SIN THE GREAT BLESSING OF THE GOSPEL.

ACTS, iii. 26.

Unto you first, God having raised up his Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

JESUS CHRIST is a spiritual Saviour. According to the original promise given to Abraham, He came "to bless all the kindreds of the earth." And the blessing which He brought was this, Deliverance from Sin. The Jews indeed rejected this blessing. To them first He was sent. But they were carnal; and had no mind to His holy doctrines, and spiritual redemption. They looked for a worldly Saviour, a Deliverer from the Roman power. When Jesus therefore disclaimed any pretensions of this kind, they were filled with disappointment and rage: and disregarding all the prophecies, by which His divine mission was proved, they

crucified the Son of God, as a Deceiver and an Impostor.

Nor let their conduct surprise us. If Jesus were again on earth, it is more than probable, that He would meet with a like treatment. Men in general have no more inclination now to be delivered from their Sins, and to look upon such a deliverance as a Blessing, than the Jews had then. Worldly blessings they still prize and covet: and so long as Jesus would heal their bodily diseases and supply their temporal wants, they would flock around Him with eagerness, and would follow him with admiration. But so soon as he should talk to them of their spiritual diseases and wants: so soon as He should offer "to bless them by turning every one of them from their iniquities;"— by curing their evil tempers, subduing their sinful dispositions, and eradicating their vicious propensities — they would turn a deaf ear to his discourses, would leave Him in disgust, and perhaps load him with reproaches. But why should we speak of probabilities? What do facts prove? Jesus, as a spiritual Saviour, *is* still present with us. He *is* still ready "to bless us by turning every one of us from our iniquities." Yet how few avail themselves of the privilege vouchsafed! How few value and desire the Blessing! How few seek after, and apply for spiritual Salvation!

—Blessed indeed be God, there are some exceptions to this too general Truth: some, who through grace are made willing to be turned from their iniquities; who feel the burden of Sin, and anxiously long for deliverance from it. In the humble hope of assisting such persons, and, if it please the Lord, of adding to their number, I purpose, in discoursing on the text, more fully to show,

I. The Blessing announced.

II. The Means by which it is conveyed.

III. The Persons to whom it is offered.

I. God hath sent his Son "to bless you in turning every one of you from his iniquities." The Blessing announced is Conversion from sin. And what does conversion from sin mean? It means something more than an outward reformation. When a man amends his life, leaves off some bad habits, and puts on a decent appearance, the world, which "looketh only at the outward appearance," pronounces him to be an altered man, a reformed character. But far different *may* be the judgment of God respecting his *real* state; for "the Lord looketh at the *heart*." Unless the change without be preceded and attended with a corresponding change within, all pretensions to conversion from sin are hypocrisy before God. While pride, or passion; while sen-

suality and covetousness; while any corrupt or ungodly principle *rules* in the soul; whatever alteration may have taken place in the outward conduct, no alteration has really taken place in the heart. The man is not "turned away from his iniquities." He is only turned from one iniquity to another, to another less offensive, it may be, in the sight of his fellow-creatures, but not perhaps less hateful in the sight of his heart-searching Creator. Some few branches are lopped off, but the nature of the tree continues unimproved. Some few streams are stopped, but the fountain still retains its poisonous quality, and merely flows in other channels. True conversion from sin is a conversion of the whole man; a deliverance, not only from the practice of sin in the life, but from the love and power of it in the heart. It is a restoration to the Divine Image; a transformation by the renewing of the mind. It implies that sin is dethroned, and the kingdom of Christ established in the soul; that the flesh is crucified with its affections and lust; and a new principle of holiness implanted within.

Such is the Blessing here announced. And is it *not* a Blessing? Would God have sent his Son to "turn every one of us from his iniquities," if conversion from sin were *not* a blessing? Would the Son of God have

"given Himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity," if redemption from sin were *not* a blessing.

Is *Health* a blessing to the sick? Sin is the disease of the soul. The man who is under the dominion of sin, "has no health in him." "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint." Sin affects his whole constitution, disorders his understanding, vitiates his affections, induces a fatal stupor on the mind, benumbs and deadens every faculty, blinds the eyes to the glorious things of God, and closes the ear against his gracious truths. Sin is the leprosy of the soul, which renders it unclean, disqualifies it for admission into Heaven, and defies the power of human remedies. Is it *not* a blessing to be recovered from such a state?

Is *Freedom* a blessing to the slave? No slave is so wretched as the slave of sin. In his heart, which was designed to be the habitation of God through the Spirit, Satan has fixed his empire. There he resides and rules. His works are done, his interests are served. His miserable captive, led by him at his will, is hurried on from sin to sin, obeys the dictate of every vile affection, and imperious appetite; and labours in the service of a master, whose wages is death. Is it *not* a blessing to be freed from such a servitude?

Is *Rest* a blessing to the heavy laden? None are so heavy laden as the sinner; as he who lives in the habitual, allowed indulgence of sinful passions. No load is really so heavy as his load. For a time indeed he may not perceive the weight. He may be insensible to its pressure. But whenever the heart of stone is softened, then he feels his burden; then "he groans being burdened." He then knows by experience the full force of that expostulation, "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmities, but a wounded spirit who can bear?" With David he then exclaims, "There is no rest in my bones by reason of my sin; for my wickednesses are gone over my head, and are like a sore burden, too heavy for me to bear." With St. Paul he then cries out, under a feeling sense of his corruptions, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death!" Is it *not* a blessing to be released from such a burden?

Is the *Hope of heavenly Glory* a blessing? Without conversion from sin no such hope can really stand. "Except ye be converted; and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." "Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord." What Scriptural hope then of heavenly glory can they have

who are not "turned from their iniquities?" God by a fixed decree hath shut them out from hope. He hath solemnly declared that "into the New Jerusalem nothing unclean shall enter;" that "there is no peace to the wicked;" that "His wrath abideth on them;" and that they "shall be turned into hell," "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." "Know ye not (asks the Apostle) that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" In the nature of things, *how* can they inherit it? "The inheritance is among them that are sanctified." *How* then can the unsanctified partake of it? Could the sensual or the covetous, the proud or the profane, the vain or the ambitious, could any who love and practise ungodliness, find enjoyment or satisfaction in the presence of God, and in the society of saints and angels? Admitted into the mansions of the blessed, they would be incapable of sharing the delights of heaven. They would be wanting in those holy and spiritual dispositions, which alone could qualify them for spiritual happiness, and could ensure their felicity. That "Fulness of Joy," with which heaven abounds, would to them be unsatisfying and offensive. Those "Rivers of Pleasure which are at God's right hand," would to them be tasteless and insipid. Heaven would furnish them with no gratifications suited to their

inclinations and desires; it would exhibit to them nothing but scenes and sources of delight, in which they could find no pleasure; and thus would itself become a place of torment to them.

Behold then the Blessing announced in the text, the Blessing of Conversion from sin. It is Health, — it is Freedom, — it is Rest: — it is the Confirmation of Hope; it is the Meetness for Heaven. We proceed to show,

II. The Means by which this Blessing is conveyed. "God having raised up his Son Jesus, hath sent *Him* to bless you." God is the fountain of all goodness. "Every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Lights." In His infinite love the Blessing under consideration at first originated. But it is *conveyed* to us through Jesus Christ. He is the channel through which it flows. God in His eternal councils having planned the work of Redemption, in the fulness of time sent His Son to execute it: sent *Him* to bless us, in turning away every one of us from his iniquities. Deliverance from sin was the great Blessing, which the Son of God came into the world to dispense. He was called Jesus because "He should save his people from their sins." To the accomplishment of this merciful design, His separate offices

of Prophet, Priest, and King, are each directed.

As *Prophet*, He enlightens and instructs mankind. He discovers to them the evil nature and dreadful consequences of sin. He warns them to flee from the wrath to come; sets life and death before them, a blessing and a curse; reproves, exhorts, encourages, invites. By His word and by His ministers, He is continually calling upon sinners to turn from their iniquities, and points out to them the only means, by which they can effectually be turned.

As *Priest*, He has atoned for their past transgressions. By His precious blood-shedding He has opened a way for their reconciliation with God; and thus from the hope of a gracious reception, provides them with the strongest encouragement to turn to Him. Without this hope sinners would never be persuaded to turn from their iniquities. The thought that God is their irreconcilable enemy, far from leading them to forsake their sins, would harden and confirm them in impenitence. It is the assurance of mercy, the assurance of God's willingness to receive and pardon sinners, which softens the heart, and disposes it to repentance. This assurance Christ in His Priestly Office has effectually furnished. He is "set forth as a propitiation through faith in His blood, for the remission

of sins that are past." Through His merits and intercession sinners are invited to come boldly to the throne of grace; to cast themselves without fear on the mercy of God, and confidently to look to him as a reconciled and loving Father. What doubt can remain of His favourable disposition towards them; for He has given His Son to be the propitiation for their sins? Let this thought inspire them with courage, and influence their conduct. Let them now turn from their iniquities; for the Lord will receive them graciously, and will remember their sins no more.

But it is in His *Kingly Office* that Christ more especially carries on the work of deliverance from sin. Advanced to the right hand of the Majesty on high, and having received of the Father the promise of the Spirit, He hath the fulness of it at His disposal, and dispenses it according to His will. By the Spirit He weakens the strength of sin in the soul. By the Spirit He brings home His word with power to the heart, and applies His atonement with efficacy to the conscience. By the Spirit He convinces and converts sinners; excites their fears; removes their prejudices; inclines them to value and to desire the Salvation of the Gospel; helps their unbelief; enables them to choose the Lord for their portion; and

effectually constrains them "to live no longer to themselves, but to Him who died for them, and rose again."

Let us next consider,

III. The Persons to whom the Blessing in the text is offered. "God having raised up His Son Jesus, has sent him to bless you in turning away *every one of you* from his iniquities." This expression intimates two things,

1st. That "every one" stands in need of the Blessing.

2dly. That "every one" who is willing may obtain it.

1st. "*Every one*" stands in need of the Blessing.

From the fall of Adam to this very hour there never was a single individual of the human race, Christ only excepted, who stood not in need of deliverance from the power and the practice of sin. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." All men, naturally, "are in the flesh," and, consequently, "cannot please God." Under the influence of the carnal mind they love and serve sin. In this respect there is no difference. "As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man." All, indeed, may not have equally sinned; not sinned alike, in the same manner or to the same extent. There are different degrees and shades of sin. But

still, in the language of the Prophet, "we all like sheep have gone astray, and have turned every one to his own way." Sin has reigned in every heart; and whatever form it may have put on, whatever direction it may take, it still is *sin*. Its nature and effects are still the same. It is transgression of the law; it is rebellion against God; it provokes His displeasure; it disqualifies the sinner for happiness; it shuts him out from Heaven. Conversion from sin, then, is a Blessing, of which "every one" stands in need.

2dly. "*Every one*" who is willing, may obtain this Blessing.

In this respect also there is no difference.

"Every one," as we have already noticed, is naturally under the dominion of sin; but to "every one" offers of deliverance are sent. "Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." — Sinners sometimes question the *Power* of Christ to set them free. Groaning under the yoke of sin, they feel as if it never could be broken. Entangled and overcome, they are apt to fear, that lust is too deeply rooted in their soul ever to be expelled. 'Our heart,' (they cry,) 'is so 'hardened, and corrupt, that no power can 'soften and improve it.' But "is any thing too hard for the Lord?" What is the promise? "A *new* heart will I give you, and a *new* spirit will I put within you; and I

will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh." — At other times sinners are led to doubt the *Willingness* of Christ to deliver them; and with the Leper are ready to say, "Lord, if thou *wilt*, thou canst make me clean." At least, they distrust His loving-kindness to *themselves*. '*Others*,' (they say,) 'He will 'pity and save: but for *us* He has no com-'passion left. We have sinned beyond the 'reach of His mercy.' — But to "every one" is the Blessing offered. No exceptions are made. What are the repeated declarations of Christ Himself? "Come unto Me, *all* ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "*Him that cometh* unto me, I will in no wise cast out." "*Whosoever will*, let him take of the water of life freely."

And now, my brethren, by way of application of the subject, are there any among you who despise the Blessing offered in the text; who, regardless of all consequences, are living in the practice of Sin, and sleeping on the brink of everlasting ruin? How shall I awaken you to a sense of your danger? How shall I rouse you to a consideration of the important concerns which you are neglecting? God hath sent His Son to bless you, and you reject the Blessing. He offers to turn you from your iniquities; and

you refuse to be turned. He counsels, and reproves you; but you set at nought all his counsel, and will have none of his reproof. You prefer sickness to health; slavery to freedom; toil and labour to ease and rest. Reflect on the folly of your choice. Weigh well the guilt of it. Look forward to the consequences. While you are living in Sin, you are living without Christ, without Hope, without God in the world. Should you perish in this state, under what aweful circumstances will you perish! "Hear ye, and give ear: be not proud: for the Lord hath spoken. Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains; and while ye look for light, He turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness."

Are there others who mistake the nature of Conversion, and consequently undervalue the Blessing offered in the Text; who, satisfied with some outward show of righteousness, make no attempt to approve their hearts towards God? In some respects, it may be, you are different from what you formerly were. You have perhaps renounced the practice of some glaring immoralities; you have possibly discontinued some evil habits, to which you were once addicted; you have amended some wrong tempers: you have corrected some bad dispositions —

But are you *therefore* converted? Have you *therefore* been "turned from your iniquities?" My brethren, be not deceived. Has your *heart* been changed? Has pride and sin been dethroned *there?* What master are you serving in the inner man? Has God or the world possession of your soul? Have you humbly fled for refuge to the Lord Jesus Christ? Or are you still standing at a distance from Him? Are you serving Him in simplicity, and godly sincerity, or are you obeying Sin in *any* of the lusts thereof? Be assured, that if you allow yourself in one point *habitually* to offend, you are in fact guilty of all; and your heart evidently is not right in the sight of God, who requires truth and purity in the inward parts. You have never yet experienced the power of renewing grace. You are "still in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity."—"Repent, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out."—"Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind: that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."

Again, there may be some who truly feel their need of the Blessing in the text, but who greatly err as to the Means of obtaining it. You lament, I would suppose, the sinful, and disordered state of your Soul, and are longing to be made whole. You

groan beneath the burden of your corrupt nature, and sigh, and seek for deliverance. But you seek it not in *the way* in which only it is to be found. You are seeking it in your own strength, in dependence on your own resolutions and exertions, as if it were a work in your own power, and under your own control. But Conversion from sin is a work to be wrought, not *by* you, but *in* you. It is a blessing which cometh *from above*. "The preparations of the heart are from the Lord." Christ alone can turn you from your iniquities. You cannot turn yourselves. It is "He who is exalted as a Prince, and a Saviour, to give repentance unto men." To Him then apply for the Blessing. Pray to Him to give *you* repentance; to "bless *you* by turning you from your iniquities." Be earnest with Him in prayer and supplication. Cry out with the Psalmist, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." Say with repentant Ephraim, "Turn *Thou* me, O Lord, and I shall be turned." Doubt not the power and willingness of Christ to hear and help you; for he was sent on purpose "to bless you by turning you from your iniquities." Distrust not his compassion, for "He came to bind up the broken-hearted; to proclaim liberty to the Captives, and the opening of the prison to them that

are bound; to comfort all that mourn, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."

But, lastly, are there not some among us, who are already partakers of the Blessing of which we have been speaking: some, who have already experienced in their souls the power of converting grace; and who, by the effects produced upon their own hearts and lives, assuredly find that they are indeed "turned from their iniquities?" My brethren, if you have thus been taught that Conversion from Sin is no imaginary work, no creature of the fancy, no transitory impression on the feelings, but a real, an inward, an abiding operation of Divine Grace on the heart, — if the Spirit itself thus bears witness with your spirit, that you are the children of God, born of his Spirit, renewed to his likeness, and made partakers of his nature; — if things be so, you have indeed cause to rejoice, and be thankful. Rejoice however with trembling; and be not high-minded, but fear. Think not, as "though you had already attained: either were already perfect." "Count not yourself to have apprehended: but this one thing do: forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, press towards the

mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." It is indeed an encouraging thought that "He who hath begun a good work in you, will perfect it unto the end:" that He, who hath hitherto wrought in you "to will and to do," will of his mercy continue to work in you: but bear in mind the Apostle's command in connexion with this subject, "work out your own Salvation with fear, and trembling." "Be not slothful, but followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises." "Occupy" till your Lord come. Use and improve the talents which he has committed to your trust, in His service, and to His Glory. If he has set you free from the yoke of sin, it is that you may the more readily and devotedly take *His* yoke, and bear *His* burden, and do *His* work. By perseverance in holiness, by a patient continuance in well-doing, evidence to the world, and to yourselves, the reality of your conversion, the sincerity of your profession, your growth in grace and godliness. By giving all diligence to these things, by progressively adding one Christian attainment to another, by daily abounding in every good word and work, "make your calling and election sure." "So shall an entrance be ministered unto you abundantly into the

everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." So shall you be included in the number of those happy and triumphant souls, to each of whom these joyful words shall be graciously addressed—"Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!"

SERMON XI.

ESAU DESPISING HIS BIRTHRIGHT.

HEBREWS, xii. 17.

For ye know how that afterwards, when he would have inherited the Blessing, he was rejected: for he found no Place of Repentance, though he sought it carefully with Tears.

THE person here spoken of is Esau: and the circumstances referred to are those related in the twenty-seventh chapter of Genesis. The subject is one which requires explanation. For the circumstances themselves, as well as the Apostle's mention of them in the text, are often much misunderstood. On hearing the account which is given of Esau's losing the blessing, and of his conduct on that occasion, persons who are not well acquainted with the whole transaction, or who do not attentively consider it, are apt to feel for him a degree of compassion to which his character does not entitle him: while the language of the text is understood to countenance this opinion by

stating, as it is supposed, that, though he were a penitent, he could obtain no forgiveness; and consequently to contradict the general declarations of Scripture, that all who repent shall assuredly find mercy.—In discoursing on this subject, I shall endeavour,

I. To remove these misunderstandings; and,

II. To point out some of the practical admonitions, which the example of Esau, when rightly understood, suggests to our consideration.

I. The best way of correcting error is to give a plain statement of the truth. Accordingly, in endeavouring to remove the misunderstandings of which I have spoken, I shall set before you, as clearly as I can, a short account of the particulars on which they are founded.

Esau was the eldest son of the Patriarch Isaac, and on this account was considered as entitled to the birthright. This birthright was something of a peculiar nature: and a clear notion of it is absolutely necessary in order to a right understanding of the point in question.—The Birthright, then, does not appear to have had any particular reference to the property and possessions of Isaac, nor to have contained in it any immediate worldly advantage. It referred to

the promises of God, and to the blessings included in them — those promises, which God had originally given to Abraham, and had afterwards in these words renewed unto Isaac: "Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee: for unto thee and to thy seed will I give all these countries: and I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father. And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries: and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."* This revelation contained three distinct promises. 1st. A promise of the present favour and protection of God to him to whom the promise belonged. 2dly. A promise of great future blessings to his posterity: and 3dly. A promise of being the forefather of Jesus Christ; that predicted seed of the Woman, who should bruise the Serpent's head, and who should be the Joy and Salvation of all the ends of the earth. These were the promises which were given to Isaac; and it was an interest in these promises, which formed the Birthright of which we speak; and of which, as no express assignment of it had hitherto been made, Esau, being the first-born son, was the presumptive heir. He was probably

* Genesis, xxvi. 3, 4.

considered by others and by himself as the person to whom these promises would of course descend.

Such, then, was the Birthright. Let us now see in what manner Esau regarded it. We can have no doubt *how* he ought to have regarded it. He doubtless ought to have esteemed an interest in these promises as the most invaluable inheritance. He should have looked upon it as his richest treasure, his highest honour, his noblest privilege. He should have clung to it as his fondest hope, his dearest possession; and in comparison of it should have been willing to suffer the loss of all things, and have counted every thing else as dross and of no value. But was this the case? Was it thus, was it with these views, with these feelings, that Esau regarded his birthright? No: we are expressly taught that it was not. He made light of the divine promises, and of all the blessings and privileges contained in them. He accounted them of no value, and treated them with the most profane contempt. In proof of this assertion we have one fact related, which distinctly marks the character of the man. We are reminded in the verse before the text, that "for one morsel of bread he had sold his birthright." In the account of this transaction*, we find, that

* Genesis, xxv. 29.

on a certain occasion, Esau, being faint and hungry, actually parted with all his interest in these promises to his brother Jacob for a mess of pottage. How could he have more clearly shown his utter disregard and contempt of the divine Promises? He reconciled himself to his brother's proposition of parting with this privilege, by profanely asking, "What profit shall this birthright do to me?" And having completed the impious bargain, he felt no concern, no remorse at what he had done; for so the language of inspiration seems evidently to imply when it is said, "He did eat and drink, and rose up and went his way." Especially when it is emphatically added, "Thus Esau despised his birthright." Now we must remember, that this event took place probably at an early period of his life: while his conduct afterwards, so far as it is stated, showed the same irreligious disposition. At forty years of age, without any regard to the pious example and wishes of his parents, he took two wives of the daughters of the land; and by thus joining himself to the heathen and idolatrous inhabitants of Canaan, testified his unbelief and contempt of the revealed will of the Almighty. Nor from this time, so far as we are told, did he ever bestow a thought on his birthright; ever felt regret at having sold it; or expressed a wish to

recover it; till, after an interval of almost forty years, Isaac, supposing himself to be at the point of death, proceeded to bless his sons. Then Esau, through his father's mistaken partiality in favour of the first-born, was directed to prepare himself for receiving the blessing: and having now, as it is probable, reflected, that this blessing contained in it a promise of prosperity to his children, and of their superiority over those of his brother, he was very desirous of obtaining it. It is not necessary to state the means by which his expectations and desires were disappointed. As to those means, we cannot approve of them.* We cannot but decidedly blame both Jacob and Rebecca for the imposition which they practised on Isaac. But at the same time we must surely see and own the wisdom and the Justice of God in preventing Isaac from inadvertently bestowing the blessing on One who was so wholly unfit for it. When Esau indeed discovered the imposition which had been practised, and found that the Birthright had been actually confirmed to Jacob, then he gave vent to the most bitter lamentations; complained of the subtilty of his brother; and insinuated how hardly and unjustly he had been used. But what ground was there for such

* See Vol. II. Sermon X.

insinuations and complaints? With what Justice could he complain of being deprived of a privilege which he had never valued, which he had never studied to obtain? With what shadow of reason could he insinuate, that he was hardly used in not being permitted to inherit a Blessing, which he had always treated with the most marked and irreverent contempt? Consider, for a moment, *what* was the privilege, which he had thus profanely despised. Recollect, that in selling his birthright he had wickedly given up his personal interest in the favour and protection of the Almighty, and in the Blessing of the predicted Saviour. He had virtually declared that he could do without these things. He had, in fact, cast the divine promises behind his back, and had showed that he preferred the most trifling sensual gratification to the Divine favour and love. Bear in mind how long he had been living and acting in this spirit. For above seventy years he has thus been "without God in the world:" and was he now to come and claim the Blessing for his own, and complain that he was unjustly used, because it was refused him? Is the Almighty to be thus contemned, and insulted, and presumptuously called to an account by his rebellious creatures? And shall we pretend to be more merciful than our Maker, and

with a mistaken and an unholy pity, presume to take the part of those, whom He excludes from mercy? Far be such a conduct from us. I think, my brethren, you must by this time see that there is no just ground for the misunderstanding which I have stated above; and I trust that if you should hitherto have been disposed to entertain a thought of Esau's being unjustly treated, you will henceforth for ever dismiss it from your mind.

But perhaps you say, 'Esau repented. Is 'there not pardon, and mercy, for the pe-'nitent? The Scriptures require us to re-'pent of our sins, and promise, that if we do 'repent, we shall be forgiven. Yet the text 'tells us that Esau found no place of repent-'ance, though he sought it carefully with 'tears.'—This was the other misunderstanding which I stated. And is it not a great misunderstanding? In fact, so far as the text is concerned, there is no ground whatever for supposing that Esau was a penitent: for the repentance of which the Apostle speaks has no reference to the state of *Esau's heart:* it refers merely to a change in his *Father's mind.* "Esau found no place of repentance:" that is, he found no way of revoking the act which his father Isaac had done. He could not prevail with him to change the direction which he had now given to the Blessing; to take it back from Jacob, and to

bestow it on him. He could not alter the divine purposes, and his Father's mind, though he sought to do it carefully with tears. —This, and this only, is the meaning of the expression in the text. And so far therefore as the supposition of Esau's repentance rests on this ground, it is totally without foundation. Nor if we look at the particulars of his conduct, shall we find any better ground. It is true, "he lifted up his voice and wept;" "he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry." But tears alone do not prove a man a penitent. He who truly repents, will condemn himself; will take shame to himself; will confess his guilt; will grieve that he has offended God; and will earnestly desire forgiveness. But do we find any of these things in Esau's language and behaviour? We see in him no confession of sin, no acknowledgment of guilt, no cry to God for mercy. Instead of accusing himself, he throws all the blame on Jacob. Instead of condemning his own profaneness, in having sold his birthright, he merely complains of his brother's injustice in having treacherously taken it from him: and so far from repenting of his sins before God, he secretly resolves in his heart, whenever a favourable opportunity shall offer, to avenge himself, and to slay his brother.— Esau, then, was not a penitent. His tears were the tears of disappointment and vex-

ation, not of contrition and godly sorrow. His grief was that of a person who finds too late that he has made a foolish and a ruinous bargain: the grief of a criminal at the place of execution, who bitterly laments the punishment which his folly and wickedness have brought upon him.

We see then with how little truth it can be said, that the example of Esau contradicts the general tenor of the Scriptures, by giving countenance to the supposition that any truly penitent Sinner shall be rejected. In fact, he is brought here as an instance of an *impenitent sinner:* of one who, from the prevailing love of sin, and of the world, suffers his religious advantages to go unimproved; profanely slights, and resists the grace of God; nor discovers the folly and wickedness of his conduct till it is too late to alter it, and to escape the dreadful consequences. It is in this light that we must view the example of Esau, if we hope to profit by it. And accordingly I now proceed,

II. To show some of the Practical Admonitions, which his example, when thus understood, suggests to our consideration.

1st. We are here admonished that we also have a birthright; a birthright, as important in itself, and as valuable to us, as that of Esau was to him. We have exceeding great

and precious promises given to us, to every one of us, to high and low, to rich and poor, (for there is no difference), even the promise of God in Christ. Consider what these promises are; the promise of every thing pertaining to life and godliness; the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come; the promise of pardon of sin; of reconciliation with God; of his special favour and protection; of adoption into his family; of the renewal and sanctification of our natures; of the consolations of the Spirit; of victory over death and the grave; of everlasting life and glory in the kingdom of Heaven. These are the blessings promised in the Gospel-Covenant; Blessings, in which, as professed Christians, we have a presumptive interest. At baptism our name was put into the Charter-deed: and on our attaining to that Faith and Repentance, which are the stipulated requisites, we may plead our title to the blessings promised, and may claim them for our own. This is *our* birthright; in substance the same with Esau's, but far surpassing it in the light and clearness with which it is revealed. In a word, our birthright is our privilege of knowing, worshipping, and serving God in the Gospel of his Son: the opportunity with which we are favoured of working out our salvation with fear and trembling: the time and the means

vouchsafed to us, for securing to our souls an everlasting inheritance in the world of light and glory.

2dly. We are here reminded of the *Way* in which we may despise this birthright. We have seen how Esau despised his. He made light of it. He accounted it of no value. He sold it for a mess of pottage. He bartered it away for a morsel of bread. He deliberately preferred worldly, sensual, temporal gratifications, to the divine favour and promises. This was his sin. It proved him to be a wicked man, an irreligious person, without any real fear of God, or faith in His word. Let us then remember, that if we act in the same manner, in the same spirit with Esau, it will prove us to be persons of the same character with him. If, with him, we sell our birthright, we shall with him be accounted by the Lord "profane." — And yet how many, it is to be feared, are acting thus, and treading in Esau's steps! How many are making light of Christian privileges, and Christian prospects; setting no value on the means of grace and the hopes of glory, and bartering away the promise of an eternal inheritance for some trifling, earthly, perishing possession or enjoyment! Think not that you are free from Esau's sin, merely because you may not have sold your interest in the Gospel by some express and formal contract,

as he did. You may be *virtually* doing the same thing. You may be habitually renouncing Christ and his Gospel. You may be living in a profane disregard of his offers and promises. And this you most assuredly are doing, if, for the sake of worldly things, you are neglecting your souls and Eternity: if you knowingly suffer any "root of bitterness" to remain within; any unmortified lust, any unsanctified temper, to retain its power in your heart. Let us bear in mind, that there is no serving God and Mammon, Christ and Belial: if you love the one, you will hate the other. You cannot at the same time be walking after the flesh and after the spirit. You cannot at the same time be both godly and ungodly. You cannot be the disciples of Christ, and yet slight his commands, his invitations, or his promises. You cannot duly esteem these things, and yet live in the neglect of them. Neither can you be said to observe them, if you are habitually ready to neglect them whenever they may happen to interfere with your worldly interests, or sensual inclinations. Every one of the persons in the parable, who pleaded their land, their oxen, or their worldly connexions, as an excuse for not coming to the marriage-feast, was an Esau. And they all are intended to represent such as like him despise their birthright; such as have in them

no real love of the truth, no supreme regard for spiritual things; but who, busied with the cares, or amused with the trifles of this world, suffer their day of grace to pass away unimproved, and avail not themselves of the mercy and long-suffering of God in the Gospel to make a seasonable provision for their immortal souls.

3dly. We are here reminded of the *Consequences* of thus despising our birthright. Men may now make light of Christ and of his Gospel, of their souls and of Eternity: but it will not be always so. A time will come, when they will see and feel the value of these things. In the hour of death, at the day of Judgment, the veil will be torn from their eyes; and things will appear in their true colours. Then the vanity of the world, the evil of sin, and the misery of their foolish choice, will stare them in the face. When nothing to which they have here trusted can any longer yield them satisfaction and enjoyment; when the world and they are parted for ever; when the bottomless pit shall have opened its jaws to receive them: when their sentence is about to be pronounced; when the ministers of vengeance are standing ready to execute it: then will they be convinced of their folly; then will they bitterly lament it; then, perhaps, will they put in a plea, and pray for mercy;

then will they begin to cry, "Lord, Lord, open to us."—But will the plea be admitted? Will the cry be heard? No. "Ye know how that Esau afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, was rejected." And so will it be with all who have walked in his steps. "They will be rejected." Like him, "they will find no place of repentance, though they may seek it carefully with tears." Hear what the Judge has already declared of them,—"Because I have called and they refused; I have stretched out my hand and no man regarded: but they have set at nought all my counsel, and would have none of my reproof; I also will laugh at their calamity, and will mock when their fear cometh. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer: they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me. For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord."—My brethren, let us take warning by these aweful truths. Be admonished in time. If, like Esau, you have hitherto despised your Birthright; if, like him, you are still persisting in affronting God, and neglecting your souls, think of that bitter, that endless sorrow, that weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, which you are laying up for yourselves. Think of these things; and now, while you have opportunity, flee from the wrath to come.

Redeem the time, while time remains. Much time, much opportunity, may have been wasted. But still, even now, it is not too late, if you set about the work in earnest, to recover the ground which has been lost. It is not too late to repent, and turn to God, and save your souls. O seek Him while He may be found. Certain it is that all who seek him with the heart, shall find Him. Certain it is that Jesus Christ, our merciful Friend, our compassionate Mediator, our almighty Saviour, is ready to receive every repentant and believing sinner, every returning, humbled prodigal, and to give to him a name and a place in His family. This is the message which the ministers of the Gospel are commissioned to deliver. Receive it not in vain. Slight not the grace of God, thus continued to you. Refuse not Him who speaketh from heaven. By faith and repentance make good your title to the promises of the Gospel. Claim your birthright. Live up to your privileges. So shall you inherit the Blessing.

SERMON XII.

THE HUMBLE ENQUIRER AFTER WISDOM ENCOURAGED.

JAMES, i. 5, 6.

If any of you lack Wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not: and it shall be given him. But let him ask in Faith, nothing wavering.

IT is one of the peculiar excellencies of the Gospel, that its directions and promises are so framed and delivered, as to give every encouragement to the humble and teachable disciple: and at the same time to leave the proud and presumptuous objector without excuse. Thus, while it "fills the hungry with good things, it sends the rich empty away." We find in the text an illustration of this remark. St. James here exhibits a specimen of the way in which the Scriptures constantly address the humble and serious Enquirer after divine Truth. I shall consider the words as containing,

I. A Description of the Person addressed.

II. The Direction given to him.

III. The Encouragement to follow it.

I. The Person addressed is thus described, "If any of you lack Wisdom."

Wisdom is sometimes used in Scripture in a limited sense, and is put for the whole of Religion, real, vital, practical religion. And the reason is clear, for nothing but such religion is, in fact, true Wisdom, and really deserves the name. But it is also used in a more general and comprehensive sense, and is employed to signify every kind of religious knowledge, instruction, or experience. And this is the sense in which we must understand it in the text. To lack wisdom is to be without it, to be in want of it. So that the person addressed in the text is described as being one, who stands in need of religious instruction. There is some doctrine concerning which he wants information; some part of his duty, on which he is deficient in knowledge; some point, respecting which he is ignorant, and needs to be taught.

But it is one thing to lack wisdom, and another to *know* that we lack it. Men may be very ignorant on religious matters, without being sensible of their ignorance. They may be fools, and yet deem themselves wise. They may be blind, and yet say that they

see. And so long as this is the case with a man, he will never look upon himself as the person addressed in the text. He will neither follow the direction, nor value the encouragement which it affords. Before he does these things, he must feel that he lacks Wisdom.

The person then here addressed, may be thus more accurately described. He is one who is sensible of his spiritual ignorance; who knows that he stands in need of religious instruction, and anxiously desires to be taught. Now, my brethren, is such the case with any of you? Do any of you feel that you lack Wisdom? There are many ways in which you may feel your need of it. I will mention some of the more common.

You may feel your ignorance in respect to the doctrines of the Gospel, and may wish for clearer information about them. Your eyes may have been partly opened, just enough to show you how little you knew as you ought; and to raise in you a desire of knowing more. Like the man, whose blindness our Saviour began to take away, "You may see men as trees walking." You may see something of God's grace and mercy in the Gospel: but you see it dimly, and this makes you long to see it more clearly. You wish that you could understand this or that point more

distinctly; that such a doubt were removed; that such a difficulty were obviated; or that such a doctrine were made plainer. Your soul is athirst for living water, and you long to draw out of the wells of Salvation. Thus you may lack Wisdom.

Or perhaps you are in doubt as to some practical step in your conduct. Two or more ways offer themselves to your choice: but you know not which of them to prefer. You would gladly fix upon that, which would be most pleasing to God, and most profitable to your own soul. But you know not which that would be. After balancing all sides in your mind, you are still at a loss how to decide. You cannot clearly discern which is the path of duty, nor satisfy yourself which course in the end will be best. Your conscience is alive and tender. You would gladly do right, but you fear to do wrong. You hesitate, and are in suspense, and anxiously wish for further light and more specific information. Thus you may lack Wisdom.

Or perhaps you feel your ignorance in another way. You are under trial and affliction. You know that the visitation is from God, and that it is sent generally for your spiritual good. But you know not what particular good it is intended to produce. You are sensible that the Lord is

contending with you; but you cannot distinctly see *wherefore* he contendeth. You acknowledge the Lord's hand in the correction. You meekly submit to it, and seriously desire to reap from it the benefit which it is meant to convey. But you are at a loss how to proceed. You would gladly improve the affliction to the good of your soul; but you know not how. Here again you lack Wisdom.

Or further, you may stand in need of instruction in another way. You may be called to some arduous and difficult service. You may be required to fill some station, or to discharge some duty, to which you feel yourself utterly incompetent. You may be sensible that God's glory and your own peace, depend on your executing the office imposed on you in a suitable manner: but at the same time you may be conscious, that to execute it thus, requires a larger measure of prudence or skill, of fortitude or perseverance, than you naturally possess. You dare not desert your post, but you know not how to fill it aright. You are afraid of making some mistake which may discredit Religion, or wound your conscience. You long for such increase of foresight and knowledge as may qualify you for performing your duty with comfort and credit. Thus you may lack Wisdom.

To repeat then the question, Do any of you, my brethren, in one or more of these ways, or in any other way, feel and lament your ignorance, and seriously wish for further light and knowledge? If so, you may consider yourself the person addressed in the text. Observe, then,

II. The direction given to him, "Let him ask of God."

God is the Fountain and Source of all Wisdom: and He only is the Giver of Wisdom. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Lights." We are accustomed to pray to Him as the God "from whom *all good counsels*, as well as all holy desires, and all just works do proceed." It is to God then that you must apply under your wants, for He only can supply them. He only can give to you the wisdom which you lack. He only, by his Spirit, can enlighten the darkened mind, can open the eyes of the understanding, and can communicate to the soul a clear and distinct perception of heavenly things. Those who have been taught the truth as it is in Jesus, have been "taught of God:" without whose teaching they never would have learned it. Our Saviour tells his disciples, that it was "*given* to them to see the mysteries of the kingdom of God:" and the reason why the

wise and prudent could not receive the knowledge of the Gospel, is expressly said to have been because it was "*hidden* from them" by God, who on the other hand "revealed it to babes," to the humble and the simple.* St. Paul could not understand the Doctrine of the Cross, until God revealed Christ in his heart. The wisdom then which you want, must come to you from God. St. James with this view expressly calls it the "Wisdom, which is from above," and in the text directs you to ask it of God.

The meaning of this direction is, that in an humble sense of your own ignorance and weakness, you must call upon God in prayer for the blessings which you need. You must confess your blindness and foolishness to Him; must open to Him all your wants, and troubles, and fears; and must pray for light and grace to instruct, direct, and strengthen you. And you must act thus, not only in a *general* way, but with a reference to your *particular* circumstances and wants. You must be earnest and importunate, and explicit in your prayers to God, opening to him all your mind, and pouring out your whole soul before Him.

You must pray also in Faith. Faith is a qualification expressly added by the Apostle

* Matt. xi. 25.

as absolutely necessary to the efficacy of prayer. Let "him who asks Wisdom of God, ask in Faith, nothing wavering." Let him not draw near to God with a doubtful and an unbelieving mind. Let him not distrust either the Power or the Truth of the Almighty. Let him firmly believe that as God is able to supply every want, so He is faithful to fulfil every promise. Has He not revealed Himself as "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think?" Is it not written that "He is faithful who has promised?" "Hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?" To pray to God without having a fixed persuasion of His Power and Faithfulness, is to dishonour His name, and instead of pleasing to offend Him. The man who thus questions the Divine Perfections "is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed:" and, "let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord." If you would pray with acceptance, you must pray in Faith, and waver not. You must firmly believe that God alone giveth wisdom; that from Him alone you can obtain it; and that without prayer to Him it will never be vouchsafed. In these respects, in your judgement on these points, you must not waver.

But while you are directed thus to ask

God for Wisdom suited to your particular need, it is not intended that you should do nothing else. It is not intended that you should merely pray for knowledge without using such other means as may help you to obtain it. It is indeed true that God alone giveth Wisdom: but He most commonly confers this blessing, as well as every other, in the use and exercise of appointed means. When He directs you to pray to Him for Wisdom, He expects that you should, at the same time, diligently employ all such other helps as he affords you for procuring it. He expects that you should consult with those, whose experience renders them more capable of giving you instruction, of removing your doubts and difficulties, and of pointing out what is proper or necessary to be done. He expects that, for the same purpose, you should diligently attend on the ministry of His word, and carefully search the Scriptures. It is in the use of these means, that He generally conveys light and knowledge to the mind. While you pray then for Wisdom, use these means, and in the use of them, accompanied with fervent prayer, wait for the blessing, which you seek. For, consider,

III. The Encouragement which you have to follow this Direction. "He giveth to all

men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given you."

These words contain the strongest Encouragement to every humble suppliant. Such persons are apt to be full of fears, and to distrust their right to favour and acceptance. Their very humility causes them to doubt, whether their prayers will be heard, and suggests to them many grounds for despondency and alarm. But the text furnishes an answer to every scruple; meets every doubt; and holds out the strongest assurances of a favourable reception and gracious answer.

Perhaps, my brethren, you fear that though you pray for Wisdom, you shall not obtain it. Now what is the ground on which your fear is built?

Possibly you say, or think with yourself thus: 'God giveth Wisdom. He only can 'give it to me. I greatly long for it; and 'would earnestly pray for it. But how can 'I venture to hope that He will give it to '*me*: to *me* who am so unworthy, so insig-'nificant, so evil? He will give it to *others* 'when they ask. But he will justly over-'look me. He will surely disregard my 'prayers, and not bestow His gift on me.' But in reply to this language it is written, "He giveth to all men." No exceptions are made to any; why then should you make

exceptions to yourself? God is no respecter of persons. It is not said, that He gives to one and not to another, — to another and not to you, but to all. The address and the direction are made in terms which include you as well as others. "If *any* of you lack Wisdom," whosoever he be, "let him ask of God, who giveth to *all* men." Do not suppose then, (for there is no ground for such a supposition) that *you* are shut out. Comply with the direction, and you will find God as ready to give to you as to others.

But, perhaps, you are discouraged on another ground. You say, 'My wants are so 'numerous. My ignorance is so great. 'There are so *many* things on which I 'need instruction. How can I hope that 'God will vouchsafe to me a blessing in so 'large a measure?' It is expressly said, in answer to this question: "He giveth *liberally*." He does not confine his bounty within any narrow limits. The only measure of it is our need. As He is ready to give to all men, so is He ready to give *all* that they require. "Open thy mouth wide (He cries), and I will fill it." We are not straitened in Him, but in ourselves. We receive but little, because we ask but little. The more we ask the more we honour God, and the more we shall receive from Him.

"Ask then, and ye shall have, that your joy may be full."

But, it may be, that your fears arise from another quarter. You not only feel that your ignorance is great: but you are also conscious that it is far greater than it ought to be. You are sensible that it has been much increased by your own past neglect. You have failed to make use of the means vouchsafed to you. Had you duly improved them, you had not now been so uninformed. You have let slip many opportunities of procuring religious wisdom: and can you now dare to hope that God will bestow it on you? Yes, you may dare to hope it. "He giveth liberally, *and upbraideth not.*" He does not reproach any with their ignorance, or past neglect. He mercifully overlooks and forgets their sin. How kind and gentle was our Blessed Saviour, in teaching his Disciples! How patiently did He bear with their dulness and mistakes! How graciously did He condescend often to repeat the same instructions! We find Him upbraiding the people, for their obstinacy and impenitence, in having seen His miracles without being convinced by them. We find Him upbraiding his Disciples for their unbelief and hardness of heart, in not receiving the testimony of those, who had seen Him after he was

risen from the dead. But we never find Him upbraiding any humble, serious, inquirer with his ignorance, or dulness. To such He was always mild and condescending. He received them kindly, and gave them the most gracious encouragement. Lay aside, then, your fears. Though ignorant, though heretofore negligent, you will not meet with reproaches. Go boldly to the throne of grace. Pray for wisdom: lift up your voice for understanding. You may condemn yourself; but God will not condemn you. You may be filled with self-upbraidings, but God is a God of mercy. He upbraideth not.

But after every thing which has been said, you may still have some secret grounds of distrust and fear. You may still think that there is reason to doubt whether God will hear your prayers. You may yet fear that He will not give you Wisdom. But your doubts and fears are certainly groundless. For, in answer to every objection which you can urge, it is expressly said, "It shall be given him." Now the promise standeth sure. What God hath promised, He will most certainly perform. "If any man lack Wisdom, let him ask of God — and *it shall be given him.*" No imperfection or infirmity in the manner of asking, no previous guilt in him who asks, no secret decree of God shall prevent him from receiving this bless.

ing. "It shall be given him." For as our Saviour hath elsewhere said, "Every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, the door shall be opened." Be then of good courage. Plead this promise in prayer with God. Wait on him to fulfil it to you. Doubt not that He will fulfil it; "For he is faithful, who has promised."

On the whole, my brethren, are we not most ready to admit that the passage, on which I have been discoursing, is of a highly important, and interesting tendency? How could the humble enquirer after divine truth and divine assistance, be more effectually encouraged than by the assurance, that "God giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and that it shall be given him?" May all ye, who are seeking after heavenly Wisdom, take to yourselves the full encouragement which this assurance is able to minister. Rely firmly on it. Let the certainty of success engage you to persist in a faithful and diligent use of the means appointed. Keep close to the Word of God. Wait humbly upon him. Be instant in prayer. So shall you grow in grace and knowledge. Your doubts shall vanish. Your difficulties shall disappear. Your light shall shine more and more unto the perfect day. You shall become truly wise, even wise unto Salvation.

On the other hand, how can proud and presumptuous objectors be more decisively answered than by the declaration in the text? They object to God as a hard master, as one who requires of them more than they are able to perform. They object to the precepts of Scripture as unreasonably severe, to the doctrines, as above their comprehension. They say, 'We have no abilities for understanding the one, no strength for discharging the other. We are unlearned. We know little or nothing of these things: but our ignorance will be our excuse. God will not require us to do more than we know.' — But to such reasoners it may be answered — "The Lord giveth wisdom." He "giveth to all men liberally." Have you asked it of Him? Have you earnestly and faithfully prayed to Him to take away your ignorance, to lighten your darkness, to deliver you from "all hardness of heart and contempt of His Holy Word and Commandment?" Have you desired to become truly wise? And have you humbly yielded yourselves to the teaching and guidance of God's Holy Spirit? If you have not done these things, if your own conscience tells you that you have never *thus* sought Wisdom from above: what do your excuses avail? To what do your objections amount? They only expose the obstinacy and dis-

obedience of your hearts. They only show that you love darkness rather than light.

Here is the sum and root of the matter. You are yet in your sins; you are yet in the flesh. You are in a carnal and an unrenewed state. You have no faith. You must be born again. You must have that new heart, and that new spirit, which God alone can impart to you. O pray to Him to impart it to you. Humbly pray to Him, that you may be born again of His Spirit. Seek the wisdom which is from above. God is as ready to give it to you as to others. Why, when He offers it to you, do you refuse to take it? Why, when He invites you to Himself, do you refuse to come? My brethren, while I am speaking, may He mercifully turn and dispose your heart! So will you be turned indeed: so will you be disposed in truth to seek Him. So will He turn to you: and will be found of you, a God of mercy, truth, and love.

SERMON XIII.

THE ACCEPTABLE YEAR AND THE DAY OF VENGEANCE.

ISAIAH, lxi. 1, 2. in part.

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me — to proclaim the Acceptable Year of the Lord, and the Day of Vengeance of our God.

IT has justly been remarked, that there are no denunciations of wrath to be met with in Scripture more severe than those which were delivered by Christ Himself. In confirmation of this remark, let us remember that the same lips which pronounced the gracious invitation, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," pronounced also that most aweful expostulation, "Ye Serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of Hell?" He who declared, that whosoever "believeth and is baptized, shall be saved," hath declared also, that he "who believeth not shall be damned." He, who

will hereafter say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, receive the Kingdom prepared for you," will also say, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." This remark will fully justify the Minister of the Gospel (if justification be wanted) in setting forth "the terrors of the Lord;" while it ought to silence those who would presumptuously blame him for so doing. In fact, they cannot censure him for discharging this part of his office, without censuring Christ Himself. Nor would Christ have fulfilled the predictions respecting His own ministry, had He confined Himself to the "prophesying of smooth things:" for we find it expressly foretold in the text, that He should be anointed to proclaim, "not only the acceptable year of the Lord," but also "the day of vengeance of our God." Whence we may justly infer, that to alarm as well as to comfort, to hold forth the threatenings no less than the promises, the judgements no less than the consolations of Scripture, is the duty and the office of the Preacher of the Gospel.

To discharge this duty, to fulfil this office, on the present occasion among you, my brethren, for your benefit, and to the glory of Jesus Christ, shall be my humble endeavour: and with this view, I purpose, (and may the

Spirit of God assist and bless the purpose!) to set before you life and death, a blessing and a curse; to proclaim to you, in the language of the text on the one hand, "The acceptable year of the Lord," and on the other, "The day of vengeance of our God." —Let me begin with endeavouring to give a general explanation of the two Periods here stated, and to show their respective Meaning.

I. The Acceptable Year of the Lord.

The Prophet, in using this expression, seems evidently to have alluded to that divine institution, which formed so remarkable a feature in the Jewish dispensation, the Year of Jubilee. This institution, which is supposed to have derived its name from some peculiar sound of the trumpet with which it was proclaimed, was appointed to take place in every fiftieth year: and it might be called in a very appropriate sense "the acceptable year." For it was a year of general release; a year of general restitution to forfeited privileges and to lost possessions. In this year, not only every Israelite who had been reduced to a state of servitude or bondage, was set free, and restored to his liberty and friends; but every estate also, which from any cause had been alienated, reverted to its original possessor, or to his family. These were the words in which the institution was

appointed, "Thou shalt cause the Trumpet of the Jubilee to sound, in the tenth day of the seventh month, in the day of Atonement, shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land. And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof. It shall be a Jubilee unto you, and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family."* Surely a year thus divinely appointed for such important purposes, and bringing with it such distinguishing privileges, might well be called "the acceptable year of the Lord:" and with very singular propriety might the Prophet, when speaking of the office of Christ, allude to this institution, as illustrating the blessings of that dispensation, which He, by His preaching, would introduce. In fact, the whole institution of the Jubilee was a *typical* institution. While it served to distinguish and to benefit the people to whom it was prescribed, it was designed also to exhibit to them a lively representation of the spiritual privileges which the Gospel would bring with it. What indeed are those privileges, but a deliverance from bondage, and a restoration to our original inheritance? What does the

* Lev. xxv. 9, 10.

Gospel propose, but to redeem us from sin, and to bring us to heaven? The Gospel finds us in a state of spiritual bondage, by nature and by practice sinners, bound over unto judgement, and under the dominion of sin. But it offers to free us from this state. It "proclaims liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prisons to them that are bound." It offers to deliver us from condemnation, from the strength and power of sin, from the tyranny of Satan, from the sting of death, from the prison of the grave, from the pains of hell! On the other hand, it also opens to us the kingdom of heaven. It proposes to invest us with a new title to this our forfeited inheritance. It promises to put us in possession of it, and perfectly to qualify us for the enjoyment of its pure and spiritual delights. Such are the privileges, such are the blessings, which the Gospel brings with it. And after this statement, there can be no difficulty in showing what is meant by the period mentioned in the text. "The acceptable year of the Lord," in the sense in which the Prophet uses the expression, evidently denotes the period of the Gospel-dispensation; the times, during which the spiritual privileges of the Gospel should be freely offered to all who will accept them. This period Christ proclaimed, when coming into Galilee He

preached the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, and said, "The time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God is at hand: Repent ye, and believe the Gospel." This period He proclaimed, when in the synagogue of Nazareth He declared to those who were present, that the passage connected with the text was in that day fulfilled in their ears. This period He proclaimed throughout the whole course of His ministry. This period He commanded His Apostles to proclaim, saying to them, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." This period He has since continued to proclaim by the publication of His written Word, and by the voice of His faithful Ministers: one part of whose office, like His own, has ever been, and still is, to preach "the acceptable year of the Lord."

But there is another Period also to be proclaimed.

II. "The Day of Vengeance of our God."

We find in the writings of the Prophets, frequent mention made of "a Day of Vengeance;" thus in the thirty-fourth chapter of Isaiah, the Prophet, in the midst of the most tremendous description of predicted Judgements, declares, "for it is the *Day of the Lord's Vengeance*, and the year of recompenses for the controversy of Zion." So again, in the sixty-third chapter, we find the

Lord Himself using this language, "I have trodden the wine-press alone, and of the People there was none with Me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury: and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For *the Day of Vengeance* is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come." In like manner, in the forty-sixth chapter of Jeremiah, we meet with the following passage: "For this is the *Day of the Lord* God of Hosts, a *Day of Vengeance*, that He may avenge Him of his adversaries." And so again in the fifty-first chapter, "Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and deliver every man his soul: be not cut off in her iniquity: for this is the *time of the Lord's Vengeance;* He will render unto her a recompense." To adduce more passages on this subject would be superfluous. Not only the Prophetical Writings, but the Scriptures throughout confirm the same truth. They all with one voice speak of an appointed Period, by whatever name it may be called, whether, as in the text, the "Day of Vengeance," or as in other places, "the Day of Wrath," the "Day of Recompense," the "Day of Indignation," the "Day of the Lord;" in which the Almighty will arise to Judgement, and will avenge Himself upon His enemies. Such a Period, Christ, accord-

ing to the text, was anointed to proclaim. Such a period He did proclaim. He distinctly predicted two events, in which these denunciations of Judgement would be awefully accomplished. One was the Destruction of Jerusalem and the overthrow of the Jewish Church and State. For a season the Jews would hear the joyful sound of the Jubilee Trumpet. The acceptable year of the Lord would be proclaimed, the Gospel would be preached to them. But when, by their persevering rejection of Christ and of His offered blessings, they should have filled up the measure of their sin, then wrath would come upon them to the uttermost. "These," says Christ, speaking of this time of unprecedented calamities, "these are the *Days* of *Vengeance*, that all things which are written may be fulfilled." * The other event, which Christ predicted, was that consummation of wrath which at the last days are to be poured out on the corrupt and apostate part of the Christian Church; which, having long abused, and at length having rejected the Grace of the Gospel, is to be visited with the most tremendous Judgements. This will, indeed, be a *Day of Vengeance*, and was proclaimed by Christ in a subsequent part of the same prophecy, when He declares that the times of the Gentiles being fulfilled, "there shall

* Luke, xxi. 22.

be signs in the sun and in the moon, and in the stars, and upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of Heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a *cloud* with power and great glory."

These are two instances in which Christ proclaimed "the Day of Vengeance of our God;" and thus so far complied with the prediction in the text. But these instances form not the only accomplishment of the Prophecy. It was not in proclaiming *these* periods of vengeance only, that Christ would have fulfilled the spiritual office assigned to Him. There was another period to be proclaimed by Him: a period, which may most emphatically be styled "the Day of Vengeance of our God:" a period, in comparison with which the temporal calamities which *have been* inflicted on the Jewish, or *are to be* inflicted on the Christian Apostate Church, are objects of no consideration: a period, the consequences of which will be so tremendously aweful, that the greatest extremities of suffering in this world will appear to have been only types and shadows of them. And what is this period, but the "Day of Judgement," the Day of the

revelation of the righteous Judgement of God:" the Day, in which He will judge the world in righteousness, and will render to every one according to his works: the Day in which He will call men to account for their profane neglect, or their contemptuous abuse of His mercy; in which He will silence their vain and impious excuses; will expose the incorrigible enmity and impenitence of their hearts; and will pour upon them the fury of his jealousy and anger, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, without remedy, without mitigation, without end. Behold "the Day of Vengeance of our God." This Day Christ proclaimed. He proclaimed it as that Day in which "the Son of Man shall come in His glory with all His holy angels with Him; then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory, and before Him shall be gathered all nations." He proclaimed it as that Day, in which He will come "at an hour that he is not looked for, and will cut asunder the unfaithful servant, and will appoint him his portion with the hypocrites." He proclaimed it as that Day, in which "the children of the Kingdom shall be cast into outer darkness," in which it shall be "more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, for Sodom and Gomorrah," than for some of those to whom the Gospel shall have been preached; in which He will say to many

professors of Christianity, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity;" in which "His angels shall gather out of his Kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." Did not the Apostles declare the same truths? Did not they proclaim the same Day, the Day of Vengeance; the Day of the Lord, "which will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up:" the Day "in which the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from Heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ?" Have not his ministers always proclaimed *this* Day? Are they not still commissioned to proclaim it? Are they not still commissioned to declare that the Lord is a jealous God, a consuming fire, who will by no means clear the guilty, but will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire?

Having thus endeavoured to explain the two Periods stated in the text, and to show their respective Meaning, I shall now proceed, in discharge of my office, to proclaim

these truths to *you*, and to set before *you* your own deep and individual interest in them. With you, then, my brethren, it is now "the Acceptable Year of the Lord." It is the period of the Lord's mercy and long-suffering towards you, the season of His grace, the day of His salvation, in which he waiteth to be gracious, and maketh all his goodness to pass before you. The Gospel, that joyful trumpet of the jubilee, is now sounding in your ears, and proclaiming aloud the wondrous blessings, which it is employed to dispense. Let me remind you what these blessings are; deliverance from bondage, and restoration to your forfeited inheritance. Let me remind you how rich, how glorious these blessings are in themselves, how suitable, how seasonable, how necessary for you. The Gospel finds you (whether you will own it, whether you know it or not,) in a state of spiritual bondage; the wretched slaves of sin and Satan; prisoners to the justice of God, shut up unto condemnation for the many sins which you have committed; and bound to appear before his Judgement-seat, from which there lies no appeal, and at which no evasion will avail. But though the Gospel finds you in this state, it is not willing to leave you in it. It proffers to you deliverance. It proposes to set you free. It offers to break every

yoke and every chain, and to grant to you a full release from all the pains and penalties of sin. It proclaims to you, in the name of the Almighty, the great God of heaven and earth, *Redemption*, through the blood of Jesus, even the remission of sins. Are not these joyful sounds? Are not these tidings of great joy? They would be so, if you really felt your bondage. They are so to those who really feel it. May the Spirit of God enlighten all our hearts to see and know our danger, that we may flee from the wrath to come! May He open all our ears to receive and welcome these glorious truths!

But hitherto I have stated only a part of these truths. It is a small thing with the God of all grace and goodness, whose mercy endureth for ever, to deliver you from the bondage of sin and death. He designs also to translate you into his own immediate presence, and to exalt you to the throne of His glory. The Gospel proposes, not only to save you from punishment, but to make you the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty; to give to you a name and a place among his children; to clothe you with the robe of righteousness; to adorn you with the graces of His Spirit; to make you meet for partaking the inheritance of His saints in light. In short, God offers to you His Son Jesus Christ: offers Him

to be your Surety, Mediator, and Redeemer, your Prophet, Priest, and King: and *with Him* freely gives you all things; all things necessary for life and godliness, for your present peace, and for your everlasting happiness. He says to you, "This is my beloved Son; hear ye *Him*," 'receive '*Him*: believe in *Him*: rely on *Him*: give 'yourselves to *Him*: serve, obey, and love '*Him*: and *then* I am reconciled unto you. 'I am at peace with you. I will be a 'Father unto you. "I will save you; I 'will rejoice over you with joy; I will 'rest in my love!" I will cause all things 'to work together for your good. I will be 'myself your portion, and your exceeding 'great reward!'

Such, my brethren, are the blessings, which as a Minister of the Gospel I proclaim to you. I assure you, in the name of the Almighty, and on the authority of His word, that if ye be willing and obedient, all these blessings shall be yours. They are secured to you by two immutable things, the promise, and the oath of God, who cannot lie. May I not hope that there are some, who thankfully receive these gracious truths; who know the joyful sound; and who, while they are listening with admiration and delight to the glad tidings of a salvation, so full, so free, so glorious, are humbly saying

in their hearts to God, 'Be it unto thy 'servant according to thy word! Lord, I 'believe; help thou my unbelief. I thank 'Thee for thy unspeakable Gift. I desire 'to serve Thee with my spirit in the Gos-'pel of thy Son. I accept Him as my Sa-'viour, my Lord, and my King. I conse-'crate myself to His service and Glory: 'and I rely on thy promised Spirit to work 'in me both to will and to do of thy good 'pleasure?' May He who has put these words into your heart, bless you according to the full meaning of them! May He inspire you with wisdom, courage, and strength to fight the good fight of faith, and to lay hold on eternal life;

But on the other hand must I not fear that there are others present, to whom these tidings are tidings of no joy: who hear with indifference the proclamation of the Gospel; and care not whether the trumpet sound forth deliverance or not? Should I say, that I have no fears of this kind, I should greatly dissemble with you. When I know in how many ways mankind neglect or abuse this great Salvation, I cannot but strongly fear that some of you may be too justly chargeable with all the folly, and with all the guilt which such a conduct involves. Are you so closely occupied with worldly cares or worldly pleasures, as to have no time for

serious thought and religious meditation? Or, are you so indisposed to spiritual and heavenly things, as to listen to the mention of them with impatience and disgust? Or, are you so lifted up with pride and self-conceit, that you will not own yourself a sinner, nor will humbly call on Christ for mercy? Or, having some convictions on your conscience, are you trifling with them, and deferring your repentance to a more convenient season? Or, professing yourself the servant of God, are you satisfied, like the Pharisees of old, with an outward form of Godliness, with the performance of some moral duties, with the mere observance of religious ceremonies; while you are inattentive to the state of the heart, are indulging evil thoughts, and lay not the axe to the root of the tree? Or, calling yourself a Christian, do you not depart from iniquity, but allow yourself in some known and habitual violation of the law of God, putting evil for good, and darkness for light? With all, with every one of you, whose heart pleads guilty to any one of these charges, I must be very plain. I must tell you, without any palliation or apology, that you are neglecting or abusing the great Salvation of the Gospel. You are slighting "the Acceptable Year of the Lord." You are trifling with His grace and mercy,

with His long-suffering and compassion. You are rejecting His gracious offers. You are refusing the Gift of His Son. And what think you will be the consequences of such a conduct? What *must* they be? I have plainly set before you the Blessings of the Gospel: let me now as plainly remind you of the Terrors of the Lord. There will be "a Day of vengeance of our God: a Day, in which you will be called to account for this your heinous wickedness; a Day, in which you will be speechless before your Judge: a Day, in which, being convicted beyond all doubt of your desperate enmity and incorrigible hatred to the God of Love and Goodness, you will be condemned with all His other enemies, to everlasting torments. Then the long-suffering of God, which you have here so long abused, will last no longer. His wrath will be poured out upon you to the uttermost: that wrath, in comparison with which the wrath poured out upon Jerusalem and upon Anti-Christ, will have been as nothing. It will be the Day of *His Vengeance;* of His Indignation; of His Fury; in which you will be driven with everlasting destruction from His presence and from the power of His Glory. It will be the Day, in which you will begin to know experimentally the meaning of those aweful expressions "the second Death" — "the outer Dark-

ness" — "the Worm that never dieth;" and "the Fire which is never quenched." — My brethren, think not that I have any pleasure in denouncing these judgements. I denounce them with pain. But I must deliver my own Soul; that in so doing I may possibly benefit yours. And if it give you pain to *hear* the mention of these aweful threatenings; what will it be to *feel* the reality of them? O consider this, "lest He pluck you away, and there be none to deliver you." Consider how soon these threatenings may be turned into realities. To-day is the accepted time, the Day of Salvation to you all. But to-morrow may be the Day of vengeance to any of you. If you die this night, and die in your sins, it certainly will be so. "O that you were wise; that you understood this: that you would consider your latter end!" Let me once more beseech you to remember that now is the Acceptable Year of the Lord. Now the Lord is knocking at the door of every heart among you, and praying for admission. Say not to Him, "Go thy way for this time," lest He cease to strive any more with you; lest He swear in His wrath that *you* shall never enter into His rest.

SERMON XIV.

CONNECTION BETWEEN THE CONFIDENCE AND CHARACTER OF THE TRUE CHRISTIAN STATED AND ILLUSTRATED.

ISAIAH, XXV. 9.

And it shall be said in that Day, Lo, this is our God, we have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for Him: we will be glad and rejoice in His Salvation.

THIS passage plainly admits, and even seems to require, two distinct interpretations. The expression, in *that day*, may be understood as referring — either to the time of the *first* appearance of Christ in the flesh, and to the consequent publication of the Gospel at Jerusalem, when in "that mountain the Lord of Hosts made unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of the wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined," — or to that still more important period, the Day

of the *second* appearing of our great God, and Saviour Jesus Christ in glory, "when He will swallow up death in victory, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces, and the rebuke of His people shall He take away from off all the earth." In the former of these senses the text represents the joyful sentiments, with which these pious believers, who were waiting for the consolation of Israel, welcomed the manifestation of Christ on earth. In the latter sense (the sense in which I propose to apply the passage) the words express these exulting acclamations, with which *the People of God will celebrate the second Advent of their Lord*, "when he shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe." With longing eyes, with extended arms, they will hail His glorious appearance. With one heart, with one voice, they will break forth into these rapturous sounds, "Lo, this is our God, we have waited for Him; He will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for Him; we will be glad, and rejoice in his Salvation."

Such, "in *that day*," will be the triumphant Song of the Ransomed of the Lord. Such will be the exulting confidence, with which they will then lift up their heads. Who does not wish to bear a part in that triumphant song? Who does not wish with that exulting

confidence, to lift up his head? But what will wishes the most fervent profit?—Would we, my brethren, realise these wishes; would we be partakers of the privileges of the Saints, we must be partakers of their character. Would we share in the joy and confidence which they will then feel, we must possess the same title to joy and confidence which they will then possess. Would we, "in that day," adopt their language, we must have the same ground for using it, which they will have. What that ground is, the language itself evidently shows. The persons are described as rejoicing in the *assurance* of their relation to Christ, of their interest in Him, and of the certainty of that Salvation, which He is bringing to them. "This is *our* God"—"He *will save* us"—"We will *be glad in his Salvation.*" But whence does this assurance spring? From a *consciousness* of their having *waited* for Him. Twice they declare, as the ground of their confidence in Christ, "*We have waited for Him.*" In the days of their flesh, they looked to Christ as their God, and Saviour. They lived in expectation of His glorious appearing. They made preparations against His second coming. Therefore it is that they now lift up their heads with joy. Therefore it is that they now are glad and rejoice in His Salvation.

In further discoursing on this passage, I shall proceed to illustrate two important Truths suggested by it.

I. That nothing will inspire us with joy and confidence in the Day of Judgement, but a real interest in Jesus Christ.

II. That none will in that day have a real Interest in Jesus Christ, and consequently will rejoice in His Salvation, but those who are now waiting for His coming.

I. I am to show that nothing will inspire us with joy and confidence in the Day of Judgement, but a real Interest in Jesus Christ. I might go further, and say, that nothing but a good hope of an interest in Christ can give us real, abiding, exalted enjoyment in this life. Whatever takes to itself the name of happiness, where this hope is not included, has no just pretensions to the name. But on this point, as not connected with the present subject, I shall not now insist. Let it be admitted that men, who are living without Christ in the world, yet possess some sources of present enjoyment. The pursuit, the management, and the success of their worldly affairs; the acquisition of wealth; the prosperity of their families; the possession of power; the gratification of their selfish, or sensual desires; the flattery and applause of their fellow-creatures; all these are things in which men

find some pleasure in this life. Far, indeed, from having any hope of an Interest in Jesus Christ, He is not in all their thoughts. Yet they are not decidedly unhappy. They are at ease, and comparatively enjoy themselves. Wholly occupied with delights of an earthly and a carnal nature, and knowing no better pleasures than such as this World can yield, they feel no need of Christ, nor deem Him necessary to their happiness. But will this be the case in the *Day of Judgement?* Will they, "in that Day," lift up their heads with joy? Will any of those things in which they have here placed their happiness then afford them any pleasure? When they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with power and great glory; when they shall hear the sound of that awful trumpet, which shall awake the dead; when they shall perceive the earth passing away from beneath their feet, the Heavens departing like a scroll, and the elements melting with fervent heat, will they experience any delight in reflecting on the wealth which they amassed, on the power they possessed, on the applause which they gained, on the pleasures which they enjoyed, during the short period of their lives? Will they then rejoice in thinking how greatly they raised their families; how successfully they managed their affairs; how pleasantly

they passed their days? Alas! such thoughts, such reflections, will then yield them no delight. All these enjoyments will have ceased for ever. One grand, one important, one interesting idea alone, will then fill the mind. One subject, infinitely momentous, will then press with invincible force upon the thoughts. 'The solemn Day of account is come. How 'shall I abide it? Are my sins pardoned? 'Am I at peace with God? Without an 'assurance of forgiveness and reconciliation, 'how shall I lift up my guilty head? How 'shall I endure the presence of my heart-'searching Judge?' But whence, my brethren, can this assurance be obtained? It can be obtained only from an Interest in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ alone is pardon for the Sinner. In Jesus Christ alone, through His blood and righteousness, is God a merciful God. By faith only in Jesus Christ, can an interest in His blood and righteousness be procured. These are truths, which are *now* frequently denied, derided, or virtually rejected, even by those who make some profession of religion. Even such persons have oftentimes low thoughts of Jesus Christ. They see not His value nor His Glory. They feel not their sins, nor their need of Him. Puffed up with pride, and darkened in their foolish minds, they make to themselves Saviours. They think to atone

for their sins by their charities. They think that their virtues will overbalance their vices. They depend for acceptance with God, on their own fancied merits, on the usefulness of their lives, on the sweetness of their tempers, on their outward performance of religious duties. They flatter themselves that they shall be saved, because they have not run into the same excesses with many others, whom they see around them; or because, if they have been guilty of some violations of God's Law, yet their hearts are good at the bottom. On these grounds, or on such as these, men now promise to themselves safety, and trust that in the Day of Judgement they shall lift up their heads, without shame or terror. But when the Day of Judgement actually comes, how will they then feel? Then these delusions will continue no longer. Then the veil of self-conceit will be torn from their eyes. The truths which they have here refused to see, will flash upon their consciences with irresistible conviction. The emptiness of their ungodly hopes, the vanity of those false foundations, on which they have here relied, will then be clearly unfolded to them. Then will they distinctly see, what they never could see before, that "Christ is all, in all;" that "there is Salvation in no other;" and that an interest in Him is worth ten thou-

sand worlds. — 'Had we this interest in 'Him,' they will then cry, 'with what con-'fidence might we now have stood before 'Him! Assured of our acceptance in this 'glorious Saviour, with what joy might we 'now have lifted up our heads! Washed 'in His blood, clothed in His righteousness, 'instead of trembling at His presence, and 'dreading His approach, instead of being 'overwhelmed with unspeakable horror at 'His glorious appearing, we might now 'have hailed His coming with Songs of tri-'umph, and have rejoiced in Him as our 'Redeemer and Deliverer!' — Thus, "in that day," will the impenitent and the unbelieving be compelled to bear testimony to the truth before us. Thus will they reluctantly unite their voices in declaring, that nothing can inspire us with joy and confidence, in the Day of Judgement, but a real Interest in Jesus Christ. I proceed, then, to show,

II. That none will in that Day have a real Interest in Jesus Christ, and consequently will rejoice in His Salvation, but those who are now waiting for His coming.

This expression of *waiting for Christ*, or other expressions of a like meaning, are frequently used in the New Testament, as descriptive of the character of Christians. They are said "to *wait for* the Son from Heaven:"

to be "*looking for the* glorious appearing of their God and Saviour;" to be "*waiting the coming* of the Lord Jesus Christ." Thus our Saviour directs His Disciples to be "like unto men that *wait for their* Lord." And in like manner, we find the Saints in the text representing their conduct towards the Lord in the days of their flesh, by the same term, "we *have waited* for Him."—It may be useful, then, to point out some of the particulars implied in this general description of the Christian character.

1st. To "wait for Christ," implies a *firm belief* of His Second Coming, and of the infinitely momentous consequences which will follow that event. The true Christian is one who "walks by faith, and not by sight." He receives with implicit submission and belief, whatever he finds revealed in the word of God. Hence he really believes, that "Christ will come to be our Judge." While some are profanely asking, "where is the promise of His coming?" he lays it down in his mind as an infallible truth, that "the day of the Lord *will* come." He entertains no more doubt, that at the appointed hour, "the Lord Jesus will be revealed from Heaven in flaming fire, taking vengeance on His enemies," than if the aweful hour were already arrived. Faith leads him to overlook the time and space which intervene, and to

contemplate the future as actually present. But true Faith has another property. It not only realises unseen things, and makes distant events to become near; but it operates effectually in the heart. It is a working, an active, a holy principle. It sets a man to seek, and to avoid the objects which it reveals; and to make provision against those events, which he believes to be coming. Hence,

2dly. To "wait for Christ," implies not only a firm belief of His Second Coming, but a *constant endeavour* to be *prepared* for that event. The Servant who *waits for* his Lord, not only expects that He *will* come, but strives to be *ready* for His coming. The wise virgins, who *waited* for the return of the bridegroom, took oil, not only in their lamps, but also in their vessels; that at whatever hour he should come, they might be ready to enter with him into the Marriage-feast. Thus, those in the text, who are described as saying, "Lo, this is our God, we have *waited* for Him," are represented by that expression as intimating, that while they were on earth, they lived in a state of *Preparation* for Christ's Second Coming. Let us then enquire what this state of preparation is. Who are they that are now *prepared* for the Coming of Christ to Judgement? They are those who are now living by faith in

Him: those who, conscious of their own guilt and weakness, are now trusting to Him for pardon and strength. The true Christian is One, (my brethren, attend to the description,) the true Christian is one, who, though in his heart he has renounced, and in his life has forsaken the ways of sin, yet still feels himself to be a Sinner; still finds that he does many things which he ought not to do; and leaves undone many things which he ought to do; and has no health in him: One, therefore, who, adopting the Publican's confession and prayer, cries, "God be merciful to me a Sinner;" while at the same time he daily comes to the blood of Jesus for the cleansing of his Soul, and for the purging of his conscience from dead works to serve the living God. He is One, whose hope, and peace, and joy, are placed in Christ alone. Through Christ alone he draws near with comfort and confidence to the throne of mercy. On Christ alone he depends for grace to make his heart good and holy, and to enable him to overcome the devil, the world, and the flesh. For this grace he daily prays; and strives to increase and improve it in the use of all the appointed means. Such is the true Christian. Such is the man, who, "living the life he now lives in the flesh, by faith in the Son of

God," is prepared for the coming of Christ, and thus *waits* for Him. But,

3dly. Under this general expression of *waiting* for Christ, another particular is also included. It implies a *patient continuance in well doing*. The true Disciples of Christ not only believe that he will come, and prepare themselves for His coming, but they also *patiently* wait the time of His coming. They do not murmur and repine at the services imposed on them, or at the trials which they are called to endure. They are not impatient at bearing (if such be the Lord's will respecting them) the burden and heat of the day. They are perhaps labouring under pain and sickness. They are involved in difficulties. Tneir conduct, it may be, is falsely represented. Their reputation is injured. These are evils which they cannot but deeply feel, and would gladly avoid. They naturally wish for an end to their trials; but they still submit themselves to the will of Christ, and leave both the time and the manner of deliverance to his power and wisdom. They remember how long the Lord waited for their repentance; and shall they now refuse to tarry the Lord's leisure? Shall they think it long to wait for Christ, who waited so long for them? No. "Thy Will," they cry, "be done; not ours." 'Thou wilt appear for us, at the time, and

'in the way, which Thou knowest to be 'best. We leave ourselves in thy hands. 'Do with us what is good in thy sight. We 'wait patiently for the Lord. We will 'wait upon Him, and he shall renew our 'strength.'

It may be seen, then, on the whole, what is the character of true Christians. They assuredly believe that Christ will come to be their Judge. In that belief they now prepare for His coming; and without impatience faithfully endure unto the end. These are the persons who are now *waiting* for Christ. And these it is evident are the only persons who will have a real Interest in Him, at his appearing. For they are the only persons who really know Him; who really belong to Him; who really believe in Him; who really serve, obey, and honour Him. These therefore are the only persons who can have joy and confidence at his coming. These are the only persons who will be enabled to adopt the language of the Text, and say, "Lo, this is our God: we have waited for him, and he will save us. This is the Lord: we have waited for him; we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation." As for all other persons, they must be filled with shame and terror at his coming: for they will know, that He is not *their* God. They waited not for Him on earth. They

never seriously believed that He would come to be their Judge. They never made any real preparation for his coming. They loved the world. They obeyed their lusts. They indulged in sin. They accounted themselves righteous. They valued not Christ. They sought not an interest in his blood, to wash their guilty souls. They prayed not for his grace, to cleanse their impure hearts. He was not in all their thoughts to any real and effectual purpose. And how then will they endure his presence? What confidence will they have at his appearing? Will they be glad and rejoice in his salvation? It will be impossible. They must be overwhelmed with confusion. They must stand speechless before Him. They must long, but long in vain, for the rocks and the mountains to fall on them, and to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb.

O then, my brethren, are *you* waiting for Christ? Are you *now* waiting for Him? Do you believe that He will come, and that you must stand before Him? Are you endeavouring to be prepared for his coming? Should He now come, even while I am speaking, in what state would he find you? Could you humbly, but confidently appeal to Him, as *your* God, and Saviour; as the God whom *you* worship; as the Saviour in whom *you* trust? Could *you* say to Him, who searcheth

the heart, "we have waited for thee?" If on putting these questions to yourselves, your heart now condemns you, O consider your state. Consider it *now*, while there is time. Make your calling and election sure, while you have opportunity allowed. Seek to become acquainted with Jesus Christ. You hear of Him continually; but be not content with hearing of Him. Seek to know Him. You will one day see him. Let him not in that day be a stranger to you. Get such a knowledge of Him *now*; such a real, spiritual, experimental knowledge of Him, that then you may welcome Him with joy. Remember that he is nigh unto all that call upon Him. If you seek Him with all your heart, you shall assuredly find Him. "Behold," he cries, "I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." My brethren, hear his voice. Open the door to Him, who so mercifully asks to be admitted. Shut not your ears, your heart, against your God and King. He, who will shortly come to be your Judge, now waits to be your Saviour. If you continue unbelieving and impenitent, He will be constrained at his appearing to drive you for ever from his presence. If you now repent, and believe, He will in that day behold *you* with delight, and you shall

see *His* face with joy. May the Lord prepare you for this solemn meeting! May He "direct your heart into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ."

And you, who are waiting for Him;—You, who with the Apostle Paul, "know whom you have believed, and are persuaded that He is able to keep that which you have committed unto Him against that Day,"—be not ye weary in well doing. Be not moved away from that persuasion, and from the blessed hope which it inspires. Hold fast your confidence firm unto the end. Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Try to know Him more. Acquaint yourselves more with Him. Seek to have more experience of His power and influence in your heart. Live daily in communion with Him. So constantly realise His presence, His love and favour with you, that when He shall appear, you may indeed know Him, as your God, and Saviour, and be glad, and rejoice in His Salvation.

SERMON XV.

EVIL OF CALUMNY AND PREJUDICE EXPOSED.

Acts, xvii. part 6. and 7.

These that have turned the world upside down, are come hither also: whom Jason hath received; and these all do contrary to the decrees of Cesar, saying, that there is another King, one Jesus.

In the beginning of this chapter we find that Paul and Silas, in the course of their ministry, came to Thessalonica, a considerable city, in which was a synagogue of the Jews. Here Paul, as his manner was, preached the Gospel on the Sabbath-days, reasoning out of the Scriptures, and proving that Jesus was Christ. Nor was his labour in vain in the Lord. For we read that "some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few." — But this success brought wit it its us al attendant, persecution: whic gan here, as it had begun in most oth places, with those

inveterate enemies of Christianity, the unbelieving Jews. "For moved with envy," not enduring the thought that the Gospel should be preached to the Gentiles, even though they rejected it themselves, they "took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city in an uproar, and assailed the house of Jason," where the Apostles lodged, "and sought to bring them out to the people." But being disappointed in their hope of finding them there, they "drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city," and then clamorously urged the charge stated in the text, "These that have turned the world upside down, are come hither also: whom Jason has received; and these all do contrary to the decrees of Cesar, saying, that there is another King, one Jesus."

It is this Charge, which I purpose to make the subject of my present discourse; and to this end I shall lead you to consider it in reference,

I. To the Persons against whom it was originally preferred: and,

II. To the Views in which it may now be profitably contemplated by us.

I. The Charge in the Text, when considered in reference to the persons against whom it was originally preferred, consisted

of two parts; both containing accusations of a very serious nature, and such as were calculated to render those who were the objects of them, odious to the people, and obnoxious to the magistrates. The first part was directed against Paul and Silas in particular; the second against the Christians in general.

Let us separately consider these two parts of the Charge, and enquire into the truth and justice with which they were respectively urged.

First, then, the accusation brought against Paul and Silas was contained in these words: "These that have turned the world upside down, are come hither also." Now, it cannot be denied that there was a sense, in which this Charge might with some plausibility have been shown to be true. These Apostles had for some time been the preachers of a doctrine, the avowed and actual tendency of which was to produce a moral change in the world; to bring about a great revolution in the hearts and lives of mankind. The aim and design of their ministry had been to promote the Kingdom of Christ: to draw off men's affections from the things of this world, and to direct them to heavenly objects; to lead them to deny and mortify those corrupt inclinations, desires, and passions, under the influence of which they had

hitherto lived, and to implant and strengthen in them new and holy principles, which might be productive of a suitable improvement in their lives. This was the object which Paul and Silas had hitherto been labouring to promote in the different places, where they had exercised their ministry: and in *this sense* it might, perhaps, be said, so far as their object had been attained, that they "*had turned the world upside down.*"—But this was not the sense in which their accusers made the Charge. They obviously did not allude to any change of this kind; to any moral reformation which had been effected. It was evidently their intention, in charging the Apostles with "having turned the world upside down," to represent them as the enemies of civil and social order; the abettors and promoters of confusion, insubordination, and anarchy. It was evidently intended to represent them as persons, whose principles and practices were directly opposed to the peace and happiness of society: as persons who had made it their business to wage war with the established rights and liberties of mankind; who had too successfully carried their point in other places; and were now come to Thessalonica for the purpose of prosecuting the same mischievous design.—Such was the substance and meaning of the Charge. But where was the

foundation for it? With what truth and justice was it urged? By what proofs was it substantiated? What facts were adduced in support of it?

If we look at the account of St. Paul's previous ministry, we shall find nothing to countenance such an accusation. At Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra, neither his conduct nor his doctrine had been such, as to give the slightest ground for the Charge now brought against him. It was true, indeed, that at the neighbouring city of Philippi, both he and Silas, on an accusation of the same nature with that in the text, had been beaten with stripes and cast into prison. But what had been the result? The magistrates, convinced of the injustice of the proceedings, had themselves come to the prison, and had "besought the Apostles, and brought them out." And as to their conduct at Thessalonica itself, we are incidentally furnished with very decisive proofs of the utter groundlessness of the Charge in the text. The following extracts from the two Epistles, which St. Paul shortly after sent to the Church in that city, evidently show, how totally different, during his residence there, had been the tendency of his preaching and practice, from that, which it was now attempted to impute to him. "We beseech you, brethren, that

ye study to be quiet and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands (*as we commanded you*), that ye may walk honestly towards them that are without." * "Now, we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, *and not after the tradition* which ye received of us. For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: *for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you,* neither did we eat any man's bread for nought: but wrought with labour and travel night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you. Not because we have not power, but to *make ourselves an ensample,* that you may follow us. For *when we were with you, this we commanded you,* that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busy-bodies. Now them that are such, we *command* and *exhort* by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread." †—Surely commands and exhortations of this nature, were not the language of One, who was endeavouring to introduce confusion and disorder: while the *manner* in which the Apostle here refers to the instructions which he had given,

* 1 Thess. iv. 10, 11, 12. † 2 Thess. iii. 6—12.

and to the example, which he had himself set, while living at Thessalonica, furnishes additional proof (if additional proof were wanting) how void of foundation, how destitute of truth and justice was the Charge brought against him of "turning the world upside down."—Let us proceed, then,

Secondly, to the other part of the accusation in the text, which was directed against the Christians in general. This part was comprehended in the following words, "These all do contrary to the decrees of Cesar, saying, that there is another King, one Jesus." As the first part of the Charge was calculated to represent the Apostles as promoters of anarchy and confusion; so this second was designed to represent their followers as enemies to the state, disloyal to the Roman Emperor, and rebels to his authority. For this is evidently the crime which it was intended to fix on them. "They say that there is another King, one Jesus." '*Another* King in whose service 'they are engaged; under whose banner 'they are enlisted; to whom they have 'vowed allegiance and submission. And 'how then,' it was insinuated, 'can they 'be true subjects of the Emperor? Where 'is their fidelity to him? Where is their 'obedience to his decrees, which forbid any 'rival in the throne, and require universal

'submission to his authority? Disaffected 'to his government, attached to another 'sovereign, they are ripe for insurrection 'and revolt; and, if not checked by the 'strong arm of the civil power, they will 'in time overthrow the constituted autho-'rities, and subvert the empire!'

But where (it may again be asked) was the foundation for this Charge? With what truth and justice was it urged? The Christians, indeed, acknowledged Jesus as their King. But His Kingdom was not of this world. Their obedience to Him did not interfere with their obedience in all lawful things to human authorities. Their allegiance to Him did not involve disloyalty to the Emperor. On the contrary, the precepts and principles of the Religion, to which they had been converted, were calculated to make them better subjects than they had before been. Their Divine Master had Himself expressly commanded them to "Render unto Cesar the things which are Cesar's." And what did his Apostles enjoin? what did St. Paul himself constantly enjoin in reference to this subject? "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities, and powers, to obey magistrates." "Let every one be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God. The powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever,

therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God." "I exhort, therefore, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men, for kings, and for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty."* What colour of probability was there that the followers of a Religion which enjoined on them such precepts as these should be notorious for their disloyal and seditious spirit? And what did facts prove? What had their conduct been? In all the places in which the Gospel had hitherto been preached, we find no instance, among those who had embraced it, of any rebellion against the constituted authorities, or of disobedience to any lawful command. What had been the case at Thessalonica? Had the Christians so conducted themselves as to give any ground for the Charge, that they "did contrary to the decrees of Cesar?" Nothing of this kind is mentioned. It is true, indeed, that at this very moment there was a great commotion in the place, and all the city was in an uproar; but who were the authors of this tumult? Not the Christians, but their accusers; not Jason and the brethren, but the Jews and their agents; who, having assaulted and dragged them before

* Titus, iii. 1. Rom. xiii. 1, 2. 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2.

the Rulers, were now accusing them as disturbers of the public peace, and enemies to the government. Surely nothing more need be added to show the groundless nature of the Charge, or the injustice and malignity with which it was urged.

From this consideration, then, of the Charge, in reference to the Persons against whom it was originally preferred, let us proceed to consider it in reference,

II. To the Views in which it may now be profitably contemplated by us.

There are several Views in which the subject before us might be contemplated with advantage: but I shall select only two.

1st. We may consider the Charge in the text as exhibiting a specimen of that calumnious treatment which true Religion, in the persons of its ministers and its followers, has often encountered from an unbelieving and irreligious world. Thessalonica has not been the only place in which unjust accusations have been preferred against the servants and subjects of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul and Silas have not been the only Preachers of the Gospel who have been falsely represented as Movers of Sedition, and Enemies to the Public Peace. Jason and the Brethren with him have not been the only Christians who have been slanderously accused of Disloyalty and Opposition to con-

stituted authorities. In fact, it is this Charge which has been the chief Instrument of Persecution in every age of the church. It is this Charge which has been often made the plausible pretence for seizing and slaughtering the servants of the Lord, both by Pagan and Papal Rome. This has been generally the cry against them, "They turn the world upside down: they serve another King." Nor has the cry yet ceased, even in modern times, and in Protestant Countries. Blessed be God! in these countries the monster Persecution now is chained. He can no longer riot in the blood of the Saints. He can no longer drag them before Rulers, and by false accusations can immure them in Prisons, or afflict them with stripes. But, though chained, he is not dead. He still lives: and in nature and in spirit is unchanged. The original enmity between the seed of the Serpent and the seed of the Woman is still the same as it ever was. The unbelieving world has no more affection for true Christianity, and for its real followers, than it ever had. It still dislikes them, and seeks their ruin. The violence, indeed, of its operations is limited, but their tendency is the same. The world, no longer permitted to lift its arm against the objects of its dislike, still raises its voice against them; and betrays, by the venom of the tongue, the malignant

feelings of the heart. No longer able to wound the Person of its adversaries, it still tries to wound their Character. It still brands them as Enemies to Society, and the Favourers of Sedition. It still charges them (but where is the Truth and Justice of the charge?) with "turning the world upside down, and with doing contrary to the decrees of Cesar."

Nor is this statement mere declamation or bare assertion. It is too strongly substantiated by Facts. It is too clearly proved by Experience. My brethren, are not you yourselves witnesses to the truth of what I am saying? Have you not heard charges of this kind brought against the Ministers and Professors of Religion? How often are the Preachers of Evangelical Truth represented as the enemies of mankind for insisting on the importance and necessity of vital Faith, and for asserting its sole and exclusive operation in the office of justifying the Sinner? For maintaining, in its purity, this fundamental Doctrine of the Gospel, how often are they charged with undermining the basis of social order, and with opening the door to immorality and licentiousness? Do they preach the necessity of a spiritual Regeneration? Do they declare it to be the Doctrine of Scripture, that, except a man be born of the Spirit, he cannot see the

kingdom of God; that except he be converted, and experience such a real and radical change as shall make him a new creature, he cannot serve and worship God in spirit and in truth? How frequently are the Preachers of the Gospel, for insisting on these points of prime importance, charged with promoting Enthusiasm, and Delusion, and Fanaticism, and all the evils which follow in their train? — Look next at private, individual Christians. Do they meet with a better treatment? Turned from the error of a sinful course, and walking by Faith in the Son of God, how often are they charged with being hostile to the welfare and order of Society! Refusing to join with the world in its irreligious pleasures, or to conform to its sinful practices, how often are they represented as disturbers of the public peace, and are accused of some secret, mischievous designs against the comfort and happiness of mankind! What in our own days has been the clamour so industriously raised, what has been the charge so repeatedly urged against many of those, who, from a sense of duty, and from love to God and man, are actively and zealously employed in dispersing the Scriptures through the means of the Bible Society, but that they are plotting the ruin both of Church and State, and are secretly preparing a mine, which, when exploded,

will overwhelm, in one common destruction, whatever is dear, or valuable, or sacred in our civil and ecclesiastical establishments? But in this charge, as well as in the others which have been mentioned, where are the proofs by which they are supported? Would that the persons, who thus lavishly deal in accusations, might be taught by the Text to recollect, that clamour does not supply the place of evidence, and that assertions are not the substitutes for facts! Would that they might be led to consider, that in thus slanderously imputing to the minister or to the professor of religion motives and consequences with which he is not chargeable, they are only repeating the disgraceful transaction at Thessalonica, and are imitating the persecuting spirit of those envious Jews; in respect of whom, let it be remembered, St. Paul has left this aweful declaration upon record: "and they please not God, and are contrary to all men!" — Nor are you, my brethren, who may be unjustly suffering for conscience-sake, unconcerned in these remarks. Are you evil-spoken of? Are you falsely accused? Are you charged with crimes, or with criminal intentions, which you know to be groundless? Be not surprised, as though some strange thing had happened unto you. You are only encountering the same afflictions which are

accomplished in your brethren, who are, or who have been in the world. As the servants of Jesus Christ, you are called to go through evil report and good report. Bear in mind that if you were of the world, the world would not hate you; and thus from its very hatred you may derive to yourself a source of inward peace and joy. Beware especially of two dangers, to which you are chiefly exposed. On the one hand, be not deterred by clamour and calumny from a faithful and conscientious discharge of your duty. On the other hand, see that you give no *just* occasion for the accusations laid to your charge. Courage and circumspection, united with a spirit of meekness and patience, are the Christian virtues of which, under these circumstances, you have the greatest need. Pray, then, earnestly for these. Pray that they may be strengthened in your soul. And may the Lord enable you to endure and to overcome for his mercy's sake!

2d. We may consider the charge in the Text as exhibiting an illustration of the nature and effects of Prejudice. The mind of man is never in a state more hurtful to itself, more injurious to others, or more obnoxious to the general cause of truth, than when under this baneful influence. Such was the case with the Jews at Thessalonica; and we have

seen into what falsehood and injustice, into what violence and persecution, they were carried away. It may be said, perhaps, in extenuation of their conduct, that they did not *invent* these accusations against Paul and the Christians in general: that they had heard of like accusations against them at other places, that they only repeated the charge, as they had heard it; and really, however ignorantly, believed it to be true. This point shall be readily granted. We will not attempt to criminate these Jews beyond their desert. It shall be readily granted, that they did really believe the charge which they preferred; they did really believe that Paul and Silas *had* turned the world upside down, and that the Christians in general *did* act contrary to the decrees of Cesar. — But what *ground* had they for this belief? On what *facts* did it rest? By what *proofs* was it supported? What *pains* had they taken to examine the evidences, or to enquire into the truth of the reports which had reached them? Observe the inconsistency and perverseness of their minds. They were giving implicit credit to rumours, which the slightest examination would have shown them to have been false; while, at the same time, they were rejecting the Gospel, though confirmed and established by evidence the most decisive in itself, level to their understanding, and even forcibly

thrust on their notice. How can we account for such inconsistent and unreasonable conduct? By a very plain and obvious solution. They inwardly hated the Doctrine of the Gospel, and the Apostles for preaching it. Hence as they were previously determined *not* to believe the Gospel, nor consequently to pay any attention to the evidence in its favour, so they were previously disposed to believe every thing evil of the Apostles and their followers; nay even ready and glad to credit any report to their disadvantage. Surely there cannot be a more apposite and striking illustration of the odious nature and evil effects of Prejudice: of the way in which this most destructive malady, when once it is allowed to take possession of the mind, diffuses its poisonous and fatal influence throughout every faculty; closes the ears; shuts the eyes; perverts the reasoning powers; and debases the moral and intellectual part of man. Would that those persons among us, who are so ready to hear, to believe, and to propagate charges and accusations against the more serious followers of religion, may see reflected in this glass their own deformity; and in time be admonished of their sin and danger! Instead of crediting every report, and believing every assertion, which tends to criminate the motives or the practices of those from whom

they differ, may they learn with candour and impartiality to investigate the *truth* of such reports, and carefully and accurately to examine the *ground* of such assertions! If they act otherwise, have they not reason to fear, that their enmity to the preachers and to the professors of Evangelical Truth results, however unconsciously, from a latent enmity to the Truth itself; that their hostility to the persons, and to the means employed in dispersing the Scriptures, springs from a rooted, however unsuspected, hostility to the Scriptures themselves?

In the passage following the Text there is an instance of conduct so expressly opposite to that which we have been considering, and so obviously designed as a contrast to it, that we could not properly close our present subject without adverting to it. The conduct in question was that of the Jews at Berea, to whom St. Paul bears this decisive and honourable testimony, "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily whether those things were so: therefore many of them believed." Observe the several particulars here mentioned in their favour. "They received the word with all readiness of mind:" with a disposition humble and teachable, desirous of knowing the

truth, and ready to admit it. They were not prevailed on by previous rumours to think disadvantageously of the Apostles and of their doctrine. They were not set against them by the late clamour and tumult at Thessalonica, of which they probably could not be ignorant. They were determined to examine and to judge for themselves. "They searched the Scriptures daily whether these things were so." They listened with attention to the facts related, to the doctrines taught, to the explanation given, by the preachers of the Gospel: and then with patience and diligence enquired into the proofs, and weighed the evidences, "comparing spiritual things with spiritual." Here was candour. Here was impartiality. Here, as the Apostle observes, was true nobility of mind, the very reverse of that dishonourable and debasing disposition which had characterised their brethren at Thessalonica. Here, also, was the fruit of such ingenuous conduct. "*Therefore* many of them believed." Truth, so followed, could not but be obtained. And thus, in the Jews of Berea, on the one hand, embracing the Gospel, and admitted to all the blessings and privileges of the Christian covenant, and in those of Thessalonica on the other hand, virulently opposing the truth, and shutting themselves out of the kingdom of God, we are forcibly reminded of the dif-

ference to which a prejudiced or an unprejudiced mind tends ultimately to lead those, in whom the one or the other respectively prevails. My brethren, flee from Prejudice. Watch and guard against it. Oppose and resist its power in your heart. Above all things pray to the Holy Spirit of God to dwell within you. "For where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is Liberty." His grace is the only effectual remedy for all the sinful disorders of our corrupted nature. May He deliver you from all blindness of heart; from pride and envy; from hatred and malice, and from all uncharitableness!

SERMON XVI.

CONVERTING MERCY A PLEDGE OF PERSEVERING GRACE.

ROMANS, v. 10.

For if, when we were Enemies, we were reconciled to God by the Death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his Life.

IT is of prime importance to true Christians, to have a "a good Hope through grace."—Such a Hope, — a Hope of at last triumphing over every obstacle, and of being made more than conquerors, through Him who has loved them,— not only lies at the bottom of their peace and comfort, but is absolutely necessary to their usefulness and activity as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. Hence Hope is sometimes called the "Helmet of Salvation," which covers and protects the head in the day of battle.

But the more truly any man is a Christian, the more sensible he is of the dangers and enemies which surround him; and, conse-

quently, the more need there is of his Hope being strengthened and confirmed. On which account we may suppose it is, that the Scriptures furnish so many grounds for a *strong consolation* to all those who have fled for refuge to the Hope of the Gospel. Sometimes the most encouraging *Declarations* of support and protection are vouchsafed; at other times the most direct and animating *Promises* of victory are given: while not seldom a strong appeal is made to our own understanding; and the Spirit of God graciously condescends to *reason* with his people on the groundlessness of their fears, and on the unshaken confidence with which they may rely on his watchful and protecting care to keep them unto the end.

Such are the nature and tendency of the passage which I have chosen for the Text. The whole scope of the argument in several foregoing verses had been to prove, that the Hope of the true Christian is one which "maketh not ashamed;" which will not leave him destitute of support, nor consequently ashamed of his confidence in that day, when its reality and soundness will be most eminently put to the proof. The Text contains the sum and conclusion of the preceding statement; and is admirably calculated to give to every true Believer in Christ the strongest assurance, which reasoning can

give, that, notwithstanding all opposing and intervening obstacles, he shall certainly in the end attain to that "Salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." In these words the Apostle assumes it as a position already proved and granted, that true Christians have experienced, in God's past dealings with them, a most wonderful instance of his loving-kindness and mercy: "when they were enemies, they were reconciled to God by the death of His Son;" and from this position he strongly infers their future preservation and final victory. "Much more, being reconciled, they shall be saved by his life." In discoursing, then, further on this passage, I shall use this division of it, and shall proceed to consider and illustrate,

I. The Position here assumed.

II. The Inference drawn from it.

I. The Position we have seen is this, That true Christians, in God's past dealings with them, have experienced a most wonderful exercise of His loving-kindness and mercy. And in what has this exercise consisted? In the great and glorious Change which they have undergone as to their state and condition, and in the astonishing way in which

this change has been effected. Let us separately advert to these two particulars.

The change alluded to is thus described: "They were enemies," but they are "now reconciled to God." There was a time when they were *enemies* to God; in a state of variance with Him, and of rebellion against Him: when there was no peace, no agreement between them and God. This, indeed, is naturally the state of all men. Whether Jews or Gentiles, whether the professed worshippers of God, or Heathens and Idolaters, they are by nature enemies to God; for by nature they are sinners. They are descended from a stock originally tainted, and share in the transgression and guilt of their first parents. "Being by nature born in sin, they are children of wrath." It is not, however, *thus*, by imputation only, by descent alone, that they are sinners. They are personally and practically sinners. They are "enemies to God by *wicked works*." All men "have gone astray, every one to his own way." In their hearts they have no love of God: no desire after Him: no wish to please and serve Him. On the contrary, whatever they *do* know rightly of God, they dislike. They dislike His holiness. They dislike His law. They dislike His service. And the necessary consequence of such a state of heart, is opposition and enmity to Him in the life.

They live after the flesh. They fulfil the desires of the flesh and of the mind. Numbers run into open and gross violations of the divine law. They sin with greediness, and cast off every restraint. But *all* in some way betray their natural enmity to God and his holy will. In some way they serve sin, and obey it in the lusts thereof. They walk after the course of this world. They place their happiness in the creature, and not in the Creator. They lay up treasures on earth. They seek to have their portion, their good things here. In short, they live habitually under the influence of that "carnal mind," of which it is expressly said that it is "enmity against God." — But of such a state, a state of so much sin and guilt, how great must be the misery and the danger! To dislike God, who is goodness; to hate his service, which is happiness; to have lost His favour, which is better than life; to be exposed to His wrath, which is a consuming fire; who can conceive the real wretchedness of such a state? Such, however, is the state of all men naturally. Such was once the state of those who are now real Christians. But it is their state no longer. They were once enemies to God, but they are enemies no longer. They are now "reconciled to God." His wrath is turned away from them. Their guilt is blotted out. Their

sins are so put away, as never more to be mentioned, or even remembered against them. They are brought into a most blessed state of peace and friendship with God. He is become their God, and they are become His people. They are privileged to approach Him. They are imboldened to call Him Father.

Nor is this *all* the Change which has taken place. They have been renewed in the spirit of their minds. Their *nature* has undergone a most wonderful alteration. They are become new creatures, in principle and practice, in dispositions and affections, in desires and pursuits, in heart and life. They now love God; they delight in His ordinances; they find pleasure in His ways; and count it their joy to walk in his statutes, to keep His judgements and do them. They now esteem His service to be perfect freedom. They look back with shame and sorrow on their former alienation of heart and life from His holy will and ways: and it is their earnest desire, and prevailing resolution, henceforth to "yield themselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and their members as Instruments of righteousness unto God." — Such is the great and glorious Change which has taken place in their state and condition. From enemies they have been made friends; from rebels, children:

from vessels of wrath, monuments of grace and mercy.

Let us next advert to the astonishing Way in which this Change has been effected. True Christians have been reconciled to God. But by what means? "By the death of His Son."—Under what circumstance? "When they were enemies." If the representation given above has in some degree shown the nature and importance of the Change which has taken place, the statement to be now made, will no less clearly show the surprising loving-kindness and mercy by which it has been accomplished.

It is plain that the whole Benefit of this Reconciliation rests with man. God cannot be profited by it. Perfectly blessed and glorious in Himself, He would still have ever continued so, though men had ever continued enemies to Him. *They* are the persons who gain by this reconciliation: but let us observe that it was God who brought it about. In His infinite mercy He projected so great a blessing to mankind. In His infinite wisdom He devised a plan for effecting it. And when, according to this plan, it was expedient that His only begotten Son should be made man, should suffer for sinners, and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, He "spared Him not, but delivered Him up for us all."

He delivered Him up as a sacrifice to His own immutable Justice and Holiness; that hence it might most illustriously appear, how immense was the guilt of man's apostasy, which stood in need of such a satisfaction; and how unsearchable were the riches of divine pity and love, which withheld it not. —— And under *what circumstances* was this satisfaction offered; this provision made for reconciling sinners unto God? "*When* they were enemies to Him:" *while* they were still in that state of enmity and guilt. Previously to any disposition on their part to turn to God, and to seek reconciliation with Him, previously to any sorrow felt, any contrition expressed, any desire of forgiveness manifested, any petition for mercy offered, God had thoughts of mercy towards them; planned their return to Him; and provided the way. In fact, a disposition to turn to Him, a desire for reconciliation, a godly sorrow for sin, an humble cry for mercy, are themselves a part of that very salvation which He designed and prepared for men. The gift and communication of His Spirit to produce in them a change of heart, to subdue their natural enmity to Him, to work in them repentance and faith, to infuse into them holy affections and spiritual desires, was absolutely necessary for the completion of His gracious purpose; yea, so necessary,

that without this Gift His purpose of reconciling them to Himself must have utterly failed. Here, then, we see the abounding love of God to His people. He pitied them, when enemies. He planned their reconciliation to Himself, when they were yet rebels to His law and government. He gave His Son for them, while they were ungodly and without strength. "God (says the Apostle) commendeth His love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."

These remarks may serve to illustrate the Position assumed by the Apostle in the text. I proceed to consider,

II. The inference which he deduces from it. "Much more, being reconciled, they shall be saved by his life." From God's previous dealings with His people; from the wonderful Loving-kindness and Mercy which He has already shown to them, St. Paul strongly infers their future preservation and final victory. "Much more they shall be saved;" much more they shall be kept unto salvation; and, being enabled to endure, shall assuredly in the end attain everlasting life. Their confidence in the Lord's power, faithfulness, and love, inspired by His previous mercies to them, shall not be disappointed.

With this view the whole scheme of Evan-

gelical Doctrine agrees. True Christians, in their reconciliation with God, have, indeed, undergone a great and a glorious Change. But the work is not yet complete. Much has been done, but something still remains, and, so long as they are in the body, will still remain, to be done. The *great* obstacle to their everlasting happiness is removed. They are at peace with God. Their sins are pardoned, and their souls are renewed. But they are as yet renewed only in *part*. The carnal mind, that natural enemy to God and Holiness, though weakened, is not utterly subdued. It still lurks within, and struggles hard to recover its lost dominion in the soul. Their great adversary, the devil, also no less constantly assaults and harasses them; and strives, by force and subtlety, to regain his power over them; while the world assails them with all its formidable weapons; with its promises allures; with its threatenings terrifies; with its snares entangles them. Now, the natural tendency of all these united obstacles is to oppose their progress; to stop their Christian career; nay, to drive them back; to undo what has been done; to reduce them to their former state of guilt and misery; and thus, if possible, to make their hope ashamed; and to leave them at last to perish in sin and wrath. But No, says the Scripture, this shall never be. — "They *shall*

be saved." "They shall be kept by the power of God, through faith unto Salvation;" and "none shall pluck them out of his hand." All their enemies, however formidable and numerous, shall not prevail against them. Effectual provision is made for their security. He who died to reconcile them by His blood, now liveth to preserve them by His power. He is able to preserve them, for He hath "all power in heaven and in earth." He is able to save them to the uttermost; for "He ever liveth to make intercession for them." He is able to maintain that life which he has given them; for in Him all fulness dwells.

Observe, then, the whole force of the Inference in the text. "Much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." Hath God done so much for His people, and will he do no more? Having wrought out such a salvation for them, "well ordered in all things, and sure," having induced them to comply with and embrace it, will He leave them to fall short of the blessings proclaimed in it, and to perish at last? Certainly not. Far be such a supposition from us. On the contrary, if He has done the greater work for them, *much more* will He do the less. If He pitied them when enemies, *much more* will he love them when friends. If, when they were in rebellion

against Him, he would not destroy them, *much more*, now that they are at peace with Him, will He preserve them from perishing. If, when they were ungodly and impenitent, He gave His Son to die for their offences, *much more*, now that they are penitent believers in that Son, will He save them for ever. If, when they were alienated from Him in their hearts, He planned, though at such an infinite price, their deliverance from the power of sin, *much more* — having now accomplished their deliverance, having taught them sincerely, though still imperfectly, to fear and love Him, to value His favour, to delight in His service, to live to His glory — *much more* will He now uphold them with His right hand, and will lead them in the way everlasting. Surely it is impossible not to feel the force of this conclusion. The Apostle's reasoning *must* carry conviction to every understanding and attentive mind. "If when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, *much more* being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."

Then, my brethren, "lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet." "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, and obeyeth the voice of his servant: that walketh in darkness, and hath no light?" Who is there among you that hath fled for

refuge to the hope of the Gospel, and is living by faith in the Son of God: but at the same time is troubled with doubts, is harassed with fears, as to his final condition, as to his perseverance in holiness, as to his enduring unto the end? Distressed and afflicted Soul, mayest thou receive all the consolation, all the encouragement, which the subject before us is so evidently calculated and designed to furnish, and which I will humbly endeavour to administer.

When looking at thy sins, when contemplating thy enemies, when surveying thy difficulties, in times of peculiar darkness, in seasons of unusual temptation, thou art ready to fear that thou shalt be overcome at last: thou art ready to cry out with David, under the impression of similar apprehensions, "I shall one day fall by the hand of Saul." 'My enemy will prevail against me.' But oppose these fears. Resist these apprehensions. Meet them with the reasoning suggested in the text. Call to mind what in times past have been the Lord's gracious dealings with thee. When He first found thee, *where* wast thou? And *what* wast thou? Thou wast in a state of alienation from Him; an enemy to His authority, a rebel to His government. But He spared thee in this state. He did not bring on thee the fierceness of His wrath. He pitied,

He had compassion on thee. He called thee to Himself by His Gospel, He disposed thy heart to obey the call, and to return unto Him. He accepted thee when thou soughtest His favour. He manifested His loving-kindness to thee, and graciously placed thee among His children. He has taught thee to pray to Him, to hope in His mercy, to trust to His promises, to walk in His ways. He has supported thee when heavy-laden. He has revived thee when fainting. He hath reclaimed thee when wandering. He hath helped thee to this very day. And now, after all this display of His distinguishing grace and goodness to thy soul; after these so many proofs of His compassion and faithfulness, is it likely, is it reasonable, is it possible to suppose, that He will leave thee, and forsake thee, and cast thee off for ever? Surely what He hath already done for thee, is a pledge of what He will yet do for thee. If He has already made thee of a rebel a friend; of an enemy a child; much more will He now preserve, and keep, and bless, and save thee to the end. Then lay aside thy fears; fears so unreasonable in themselves, so dishonourable to thy Saviour. Wait upon Him in faith and prayer. Rely on His mercy and truth. So shalt thou be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man. So shall thy peace, and

hope, and joy, be greatly increased. So shalt thou find rest unto thy soul, and shalt go on thy way rejoicing.

But though this be the *chief* use which we should make of the subject before us, it is not the *only* purpose to which it may be profitably applied. It suggests some serious considerations of a general nature. It reminds us *all* of our natural state. It reminds us that we have *all* been in a state of hostility towards God, of alienation from Him, of rebellion against him. We *have been* enemies to Him. — But *are we still* enemies to Him? Is this our state at present? Or have we been reconciled unto God? Have we made our peace with Him? Are we no longer enemies, but friends; no longer rebels, but children? If this be not the case; if we are still opposed to God, and at variance with Him; O let us consider our state and our danger. Let us so consider these things, that we may flee from the wrath to come. Let us make peace with our adversary while yet we are in the way with Him. A door of reconciliation is open. All things are now ready. By the declarations of Scripture, by the voice of His Ministers, the Lord is daily saying to us, 'Be ye reconciled unto me.' "Take hold of my strength, that ye may make peace with me, and ye shall make peace with me."

Perhaps you say, 'We *are* reconciled 'unto God. We think, we hope, that we '*have* made our peace with Him.' See, then, that ye have really made it. Deceive not yourselves with a vain presumption. Bear it constantly in mind, that there can be no real reconciliation with God, unless there be also an habitual separation from sin. God and sin can never be reconciled. If you are reconciled unto God, you must have put away sin. Christ's salvation is a salvation from sin, from the practice, from the power, from the love of it. True religion begins with the conversion of the heart from sin to God, and proceeds with the gradual renovation of our nature, and with its restoration to the Divine Image and likeness in righteousness and true holiness. The true Christian is one, who being 'regenerated, and made the child of God 'by adoption and grace, is daily renewed 'by His Holy Spirit.' Is this *your* Religion? Is this *your* experience of its power and influence on your soul? Till this be in some measure the case, the Scriptures give you no reason to think that you are as yet reconciled unto God. "The Grace of God, which bringeth salvation, teacheth us, that denying all ungodliness, and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that

blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify us unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

SERMON XVII.

ON THE SIN OF SWEARING.

MATTHEW, v. 35.

But I say unto you, Swear not at all.

THE Moral Law, or the Law of the Ten Commandments, in which form it was published at Mount Sinai, is calculated to answer two important ends in subserviency to the Covenant of Grace. First, it is a powerful Instrument by which the Spirit convinces men of sin, and so leads them to seek refuge in the Gospel. Secondly, it is a Rule for the conduct of Believers, and furnishes them with a spiritual Standard for trying the sincerity of their profession, and for measuring the extent of their obedience. These were the uses of the moral Law, under the Jewish Dispensation, and the same are still its uses under the Christian. Under the Jewish Dispensation, indeed, these ends were by degrees totally defeated

by the corrupt glosses and false interpretations which the Priests and Scribes put on the sacred text; so that, by the time at which our Saviour came into the world, "they had made the word of God of none effect through their traditions." Stripped of its spiritual meaning, and even circumscribed in its literal sense, the Law was neither useful for reproof, nor profitable for instruction in righteousness. One object, therefore, of Christ's Ministry was to remedy this evil, and to restore the Law to its original purity and legitimate use. Accordingly, in the Sermon on the Mount, having solemnly declared, that "He was not come to destroy the Law, but to fulfil it," he proceeded to expose in several instances that corrupt mode of interpretation which was become so prevalent; and at the same time to point out the true meaning and spiritual import of the Divine Law. Among other instances, He selected the way in which they explained, and by their explanation, in fact, made void, the Third Commandment, "Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain."

The Prohibition here given was evidently designed to extend to every disrespectful and irreverent mention of the Name of God, and of things connected with him, according to that further explication of the Command-

ment in Leviticus, "Ye shall not swear by my name falsely; neither shalt thou profane the Name of thy God. I am the * Lord." But how did the Jews explain this Law? They restricted its meaning to the first part of the explication, and totally omitted the second. They represented it as merely saying, "Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thy vows." Thus, by their interpretation, they made void the Law, for by limiting the prohibition exclusively to perjury, and to the breaking of vows, they indirectly, at least, gave a licence to the custom of profane swearing, and to the introduction of oaths into common conversation, or on unnecessary occasions, as if these practices were not equally forbidden in the original Commandment, and were not equally a violation of its holy and spiritual injunctions. In opposition, then, to this defective and most mischievous explanation of the Law, our Lord declared in the text, "But I say unto you, Swear not at all." And then, lest it should be supposed that this interpretation, however comprehensive, referred only to the irreverent mention of the Divine Name, and not to every kind and description of profane imprecation and oath, He added, "neither by Heaven, for

* Leviticus, xix. 12.

it is God's throne: nor by the earth, for it is His footstool: neither by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King: neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black."

Such was the occasion on which our Lord delivered the admonition in the text, "Swear not at all:" and would that there were no occasion at these times to repeat the admonition! But, alas! "because of swearing the land mourneth." That corrupt interpretation of the Commandment, which was authoritatively taught among the Jews, is practically adopted by the great bulk of nominal Christians: and numbers of those who would be afraid and ashamed of committing perjury, are not afraid or ashamed of habitually profaning the name of God. Indeed, the practice of swearing, and the consequent violation of the Third Commandment, prevails to a most dreadful and a most enormous extent, and is a melancholy but decisive proof of the little real influence which true religion has on the minds of a very large proportion of those who bear the Christian name. It is this consideration of the prevalence and magnitude of the sin in question that has determined me, on the present occasion, to bring it more immediately and distinctly before you. And may the Lord, whose name is Holy, and who is

greatly to be feared in the congregation of His saints, graciously assist me in the exposition of His law, and powerfully apply it to your hearts and consciences, for correction or instruction in righteousness, according to your several wants, cases, and circumstances!

I shall endeavour,

I. To explain and illustrate the sin in question.

II. To show its aggravated guilt.

III. To point out the awful state of those who practise it.

I. The sin in question is one of those which are called sins of the tongue: for it is committed by that unruly member. But sins of the tongue, like all other sins, take their rise in the heart. It is "out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaketh." The language of the lips is but an indication of the state of the heart. This point must be constantly kept in view during the whole of our discussion, or we shall at last arrive at only very imperfect ideas on the subject.—Our present business, however, is with the *overt act* of the sin, which consists in *profaning the name of God.* To *profane* sacred things is to treat them as if they were common and unholy. To profane the *name* of God is to treat it in this way; to use it with irreverence and contempt; to

speak of God, and of things relating to Him, in an irreligious and ungodly manner, without any awful impression on the mind of His Presence, His Majesty, and His Holiness.—This is the sin in question; but, for the clearer explanation of it, I will consider it under three distinct and principal branches.

1. One branch of this sin, and a very evident breach of the Divine Commandment, is cursing and swearing. Under this head are to be ranged those horrid imprecations by which persons express the passion and enmity of their hearts, and invoke the Divine vengeance on themselves and others. Under this head, also, are to be placed those blasphemous and impious expressions which men intermingle with their language, and by which they attempt to give either point or weight to their discourse. But on this head there is no occasion to enlarge. Cursing and swearing are unfortunately too well known among us to require any detailed explanation.

2. Another branch of the sin in question is the familiar and irreverent introduction of oaths into common conversation, and about the common concerns of life. The taking of an oath is a religious act. It is a solemn appeal to God, who seeth and searcheth the heart, as to the truth and sincerity of our words and professions. Whenever, therefore,

we are *lawfully* put to our oath, we should yet remember that it is to be taken with that reverential awe and religious impression which the solemnity imposes. To introduce, then, this act of religion into our common intercourse with one another is a great profanation. To invoke God to witness the truth of our words, or to use expressions equivalent to such an invocation, when no oath is lawfully required of us, when no religious feeling is entertained, when nothing but the establishing of our own veracity, on some disputed point, or in respect to some worldly matter, is in view, is evidently to violate both the letter and the spirit of the commandment, "To take the name of the Lord our God in vain." It is to use sacred things as if they were common: to treat the Majesty of God with lightness and contempt; and, consequently, to profane His holy name.

3. A third branch of this sin consists in mingling religious language in our common discourse without any correspondent feelings in our heart. To this head we may refer the light and inconsiderate use of such ejaculations as these, 'God bless me.' 'The Lord have mercy on me!' 'As I hope to be saved!' and such like expressions: expressions which are common, indeed, in the mouths of men, but which, when used

without becoming seriousness of mind, as is too generally the case, are little better than a profane mockery of real piety. To the same class we may also refer the irreverent mention of sacred words, such as "God," and "Christ," and "Lord," and "Heaven," and many others of a like description, which men use as mere unmeaning exclamations, for the purpose of filling up, or of connecting their ordinary discourse: but all of which are violations of the Divine commandment, and profane the name of God.

Such is the sin against which we are so strongly admonished in the text. "I say unto you, swear not at all." I now proceed,

II. To show its aggravated guilt.

Every transgression of the law is sin, and brings guilt on the transgressor. But every sin is not of equal magnitude, nor involves the transgressor in equal guilt. Some sins are more aggravated than others, and bring with them a larger share of guilt. Such is the case with the sin before us. It is a great and an aggravated sin, and consequently entails a proportionate degree of guilt. This representation will be fully proved from the three following considerations of its nature and quality.

1. It is a *gratuitous* sin.

By a *gratuitous* sin, I mean a sin wantonly committed, without any of those in-

ducements by which men are usually drawn into the commission of evil. Temptation, indeed, is no justification of sin. A man cannot plead, in defence of a sinful action, that he was tempted to commit it. But yet it is evident, that the circumstances under which a man is induced to the commission of a sin, has a tendency, in some degree, to increase or to diminish the relative guilt of it. The sin of Peter, in denying Christ, was doubtless a very heinous offence, yet, being committed under the immediate impression of a sudden and personal fear, strikes us as less aggravated in its guilt than that of Judas, who, from the sordid love of gain, deliberately bargained to sell his Master. But the sin of which we are speaking is totally void of any inducement at all. No man can plead, in extenuation of the guilt of swearing, even the poor excuse which strong temptation furnishes. It is a sin which offers no gratification to pride, to lust, or to covetousness. It holds out to those who commit it no prospect of credit, of pleasure, or of profit. They cannot say that they are the greater, the happier, or the richer, for profaning the name of God. It is a sin altogether gratuitous; the mere overflowings of ungodliness; the spontaneous effusion of the enmity and abomination of the heart; a sin which men are under no solicitation to commit, and

which they can only commit for the sake of sinning.

2. It is also a *wilful* sin.

Every sin may be said, in one sense, to be wilful: for it is committed at the time with the consent of the will. It is this consent, in fact, which constitutes the very essence of sin. If the will do not yield to a temptation, no guilt is contracted: but no sooner does the will consent, than the sin is virtually committed, and the soul guilty before God. —— But *wilful*, in the sense in which I am using the word, has a still stronger meaning. It means a predetermination of the will to commit sin; an habitual readiness of mind to comply with the suggestion to evil, whenever it occurs; an obstinate adherence to the practice of it, without any serious attempt or intention to discontinue and oppose it. Now it is obvious that sin committed under such circumstances, and with such a disposition, is of a nature peculiarly aggravated. Yet such is the case with the sin before us. It is in the sense here given a *wilful sin*. It is committed, not only with the consent of the will, but without any serious effort or desire to prevent the commission of it. Persons, indeed, are apt to deny this position. They are ready to say, that when they swear or profane the name of God, it is generally without any meaning

at all, and, therefore, certainly without any deliberate or evil intention; that the words escape from their lips before they are aware, and even against their wishes; and that so far from the offence being wilful and premeditated, it has not even the assent of the will. —— But these representations are not true. In refutation of them we may adduce the following proof. Let a person the most addicted to this sin be in the company of one of his fellow-creatures, whose authority he fears, or whose favour he desires; let him be in the presence of his master, of his minister, or of a magistrate: and what is the consequence? He refrains his tongue from evil. He sets a watch over the door of his mouth, that he offend not. He checks his sinful propensity, and, *for the time*, abstains from the use of profane language. Is not this notoriously the case? And, if it be so, is it not also notoriously the case, that he might, *at all times*, abstain from this practice, and check this propensity, if he were so disposed? Does not this one circumstance prove that the fault is in the will: and that if this sin is practised, the practice arises from the will not being stedfastly and habitually set against it? It is evident that the will not only consents to the sin, but is also previously ready to commit it. And what is a sin thus committed but a wilful sin?

3. Further, it is a *presumptuous* Sin.

By a presumptuous sin is meant a sin of a very daring and malignant nature: a sin committed, as it were, in defiance of God, and against light, knowledge, and conviction. Surely sins of this description must bring with them a guilt of peculiar aggravation. But of this description is the Sin in the text. It is a sin immediately committed against God Himself. Every sin, indeed, is an attack made upon God. But the Sin of swearing and profaning the Name of God is an attack made on Him, not in the person of His creatures, but in His own Person: it is an attack directly made on His Majesty and Holiness; and made, too, in open opposition to His commands, and in a daring defiance of His threatenings. Under both dispensations God has most solemnly and expressly forbidden the practice of this Sin —under the Jewish dispensation by a voice from heaven, and in words written with His own finger on a Table of Stone, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord Thy God in vain:" — under the Christian, by His Son, whom He sent from heaven and has commanded us to hear; and whose words are these, "I say unto you, Swear not at all." Nor are any persons, who have the light of the Gospel around them, so ignorant as not to know these things. The ways in

which they speak of this Sin, in which, as we have seen, at some times they altogether refrain from it, and at other times endeavour to excuse and palliate it, all plainly show, that they *know* the practice of it to be wrong. They know, and are convinced in their own consciences, that God has forbidden them to take his name in vain. But, notwithstanding this knowledge and conviction, they dare to break the command, and presumptuously sin.

From this detailed view of the nature and quality of the Sin in question, we may form some just conceptions of its magnitude. It is a Sin, *gratuitous*, *wilful*, and *presumptuous*. How great, then, how aggravated must be its guilt!

III. I point out the aweful State of those who practise this Sin.

On this head there can be little necessity for enlarging. If such as we have seen, be the aggravated Guilt of profaning the Name of God, most aweful indeed must be the state of those who practise this Sin. Some few observations, however, may serve to illustrate and enforce this conclusion.

1. The State of those who practise this sin must be most aweful, because God has, in an especial manner, denounced his vengeance against them. He has solemnly declared, that " He will not hold them guilt-

less." Now this expression implies much more than it may at first sight seem to denote. When the Almighty says, that "He will not hold them guiltless," He intends to declare, in a manner peculiarly strong and impressive, that *He will hold them guilty.* He will not overlook their sin. He will not forget it. He will write it in his book. He will treasure it in his memory. He will one day bring them into judgement; will call them to account for their profane and contemptuous disregard of His Majesty and Power; will convict and condemn them before the assembled universe; and will finally pour out upon them his wrath to the uttermost. Thus He will hold them guilty. In proof of God's peculiar indignation against this sin, do we not occasionally witness, even in this life, some examples of his judgement on those who are guilty of it? Have we not sometimes heard of sinners of this description, who in the midst of their oaths and imprecations have been cut off by some sudden and signal display of Almighty vengeance, and have been sent in a moment into eternity with blasphemy in their mouths, and with all their guilt upon their heads? Such things have been; and whenever they do occur, in a most striking manner, they admonish us of the aweful state of those who practise this sin, and on whom the wrath of

God abideth. Surely the following passage from the book of Psalms, in which the impiety and the doom of these sinners are so strongly depicted, is sufficient to strike terror into the soul of the most hardened swearer. "As he loved cursing, so let it come unto him: as he delighted not in blessing, so let it be far from him. As he clothed himself with cursing, like as with his garment; so let it come into his bowels like water, and like oil into his bones. Let it be unto him as the garment which covereth him, and for a girdle wherewith he is girded continually." *

2. The State of those who practise this sin must be very aweful, inasmuch as it is a state of ripeness and fitness for destruction. When Judas the traitor died, it is said of him, "he fell by transgression, that he might go to his own place." † This place was Hell, the place of torment and punishment; and it is called *his own place*, because it was the place, and the only place, for which he was fitted. It was the place prepared for him and suited to him; the place where he would meet with wickedness congenial to his own. — And when profane and impious swearers die, whither will they go? What place is reserved for them? They must go to "*their own place.*" And what place is this but Hell,

* Psalm cix. 17, 18, 19. † Acts, i. 25.

the only place for which they are fitted and prepared? Already they breathe the sentiments and speak the language of Hell. Already they show their congeniality with this place of sin and blasphemy. This, then, is *their place* to which they must evidently go. There only will they meet with associates and employments adapted to their taste and nature. There, with the devil and his angels, will they be tormented day and night, and will gnaw their tongues for pain, and will curse and blaspheme the God of Heaven for ever.—Is it not an aweful state indeed to be fit and ripe for such a place?

3. To practise this sin is to be in a most aweful State, because it is a certain sign of an unregenerate condition. No man, who profanes the name of God, can be the child of God. I will adduce two, out of many proofs, in support of this assertion.

Those who are born of God have the fear of Him in their hearts. It is a part of that new and holy nature, which in regeneration they have received. He hath taught them to fear His name. How then can they profane it? How can they speak lightly of that God, whom as a Father they venerate and love with every pious and devout affection? They cannot do it. Those who commit this sin, plainly testify that they have no fear of God before their eyes. They stand in awe

of men, and in *their* presence will abstain from oaths; but they stand not in awe of God, nor are afraid in *His* presence to swear? How then can they be his children? "They are of their Father the Devil, and the Works of their Father they will do."

Again we are expressly told, that "whosoever is born of God, doth not commit sin." * He may be occasionally overtaken by a fault. By inadvertence or surprise he may enter into temptation. But he will not *commit* sin; he will not *knowingly, allowedly, and habitually practise* any evil way. Nay, it is added, "he cannot sin, because he is born of God." The new nature, which in regeneration he has received from God, is holy in its principle, and will not allow him to live in sin. Born of the Spirit, He walks in the Spirit, and cannot wilfully and presumptuously sin against Him. Those who thus sin are not born of God. Those who practise any sin, and consequently the sin in the text, give ample and unequivocal proof that they are still in a carnal and unregenerate state; a state in which they cannot please God; a state in which, if they continue, all the mercies of God can have no other effect, than to sink them into deeper and heavier condemnation.

And now, my brethren, what say *you* to

* 1 John, iii. 9.

those things? Are you practising the Sin which has been explained? Are you involved in the aggravated Guilt of it? Are you in the aweful state which has been described? When I consider how very widely the dreadful practice of profaning the Name of God prevails; when I know how generally our towns and villages, our streets and lanes, our fields and houses, resound with oaths and imprecations, with profane and impious language, I cannot but greatly fear, that some of you, at least, are too deeply concerned in the truths which have been stated. O remember, if your conscience at this moment bears testimony against you, and tells you with a voice which you cannot misunderstand, that you are one of those who take the name of God in vain.—O remember, what you have seen to be your aweful state. Unregenerated by the Spirit of God, ripe for destruction, and under the curse of God, you are madly rushing on destruction; you are wantonly exposing yourself to instant everlasting ruin. And for the sake of *What?* Of a Sin, which has neither pleasure nor profit, nor credit attached to the commission of it; which yields no present gratification, and which never can yield any thing but sorrow, shame, and death. Think not to escape the force of this conclusion, by saying to yourself, that you do not *practise* this sin:

that you only swear occasionally, under peculiar circumstances, when your temper is ruffled, or when you are off your guard. Call to mind the solemn declaration in the Text, "I say unto you, Swear not *at all.*" Every person, be assured, is guilty of habitually profaning the Name of God, who does not habitually desist from the practice. Bear in mind that "blasphemies proceed out of the heart." The very essence of this sin consists in that total absence of all godly fear, in that daring and impious disregard of the Divine Presence and Majesty, which proceed and accompany the commission of it. How, then, can even the *occasional allowance* of such a state of heart be defended? How can it consist with the profession of Christianity? My brethren, listen to the Apostolical injunctions: "Let *all* bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, be put away from you." "Put off also *all* these, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication, out of your mouth." "Above all things, my brethren, swear not; neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath; but let your yea, be yea, and your nay, be nay; lest ye fall into condemnation." Live in the spirit of these injunctions. Let not blessing and cursing proceed out of the same mouth. Let not your tongue, which was made to bless the Lord,

be allowed to profane His Name. Use that member, which distinguisheth you from the brute creation, to edification, and not to destruction. At the same time, remember, that since it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaketh, it is *there*, in the heart, that the great work of reformation must begin, and must be carried on. The tree must be made good, or the fruit will never be good. So long as the tree is evil, the fruit will be evil. So long as the heart is unclean, the tongue will be polluted. Here then apply the remedy. Seek to be purified in the inner man. Pray for the regenerating grace of God to renew and sanctify your heart. So shall your conversation be seasoned with grace. So shall it minister grace unto the hearers.

SERMON XVIII.

THE BLESSINGS OF REDEMPTION.

LUKE, i. 68, 69.

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel: for He hath visited, and redeemed His People, and hath raised up a Horn of Salvation for us, in the House of His Servant David.

THIS was the language in which the aged Zacharias expressed the devout and joyful feelings of his soul. For a time he had been deprived of the power of speech, because he had not believed the words of the angel. But when the season of this temporary chastisement was over, the first use which he made of his tongue, was to break forth into praises and thanksgivings to God. Being filled with the Holy Ghost, he gave vent to his pious feelings in pouring forth that divine song, of which the text is the beginning. And what was the subject of his song? It was that great and glorious event, to which the people of God had always been looking forward with anxiety and hope; of which all the prophets had spoken; and of

which the pious remnant among the Jews were now in constant expectation, namely, the coming into the world of the promised Saviour; that righteous Branch, whom the Lord was to raise unto David; and who, as a King, was to reign and prosper, and to execute judgement and justice on the earth." This event, so long foretold, so anxiously desired, was now about to be accomplished. His immediate birth had been announced by a messenger from Heaven. His Forerunner, himself the subject of prophecy, was already born under miraculous circumstances. In the near and certain prospect, therefore, of the appearance of this glorious person, Zacharias spoke of Him as if he were already come, and said, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed His people, and hath raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David." We see then with what propriety this divine song is introduced into the service of our church: for if Zacharias had reason, in the near approach of the event, to bless God for having visited, redeemed, and saved His people; much more reason have *we* to bless Him for these mercies, to whom they are so much more clearly and distinctly revealed. In this passage, the Mercies which we have received from the condescension and grace of God are described by

three different terms, each of which I will separately consider and explain, showing the connection which subsists between them, and the grounds which, when taken together, they furnish for our gratitude and joy.

I. "God hath *visited* his people."

When God is said in Scripture to *visit* men, it sometimes means that He will come to them in wrath, and will inflict judgements and punishments on them. As when it is said, "I will *visit* the iniquity of the Fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation." And again, "I will *visit* their offences with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes." And again, "Shall I not *visit* for these things?" (saith the Lord) "and shall not my soul be avenged of such a nation as this?" But such, clearly, is not the meaning of the expression in the text. Here it signifies, as the sense plainly shows, a *merciful* interposition; a signification in which also the word is often used in Scripture. As when the Lord is said to have "*visited* Sarah, so that she conceived a son in her old age." In like manner, He is said to have *visited* the Israelites in Egypt, when He sent Moses to deliver them out of that cruel bondage. Thus also the Psalmist prays in behalf of the church and nation of Israel. "O Lord of Hosts, look down from Heaven, and behold and *visit* this vine:" that is, re-

gard it with favour, and show mercy unto it. In this sense, then, the Lord is said in the text to have *visited* his people. Zacharias blesses and praises Him for His merciful interposition in their behalf. — But of what kind was this interposition? In what particulars did this His mercy show itself? For we have as yet reached but a part of the sense of the expression. The Lord, indeed, did mercifully interpose in behalf of his people. But this is not all which is meant. He *visited* them *in mercy*. But he did more. He fulfilled the expression literally. He *visited* them also in *Person*. He not only interposed to show them mercy: but He came himself to bring and to dispense that mercy. He laid aside his Glory as God. He came down from Heaven; and entered into this world. Yea, He came in our nature; and, to the astonishment of the heavenly world, was found in fashion as a man. Born of a woman, he became partaker of flesh and blood. Born under the law, He became, though himself the Lawgiver, yet subject to the Law. And all this he did, be it remembered, in mercy to man; on a gracious errand of love and peace. On contemplating this extraordinary event, well may we adopt the Psalmist's words, and say, "Lord, what is man that thou art (*so*) mindful of Him? And the Son of man, that Thou (*thus*) visitest Him?"—

When God would graciously interpose in our behalf; when He would show mercy to us; was there no messenger to be found but the Lord of Life Himself? No, my brethren, there was none else. It was only by *visiting* us, by coming down from Heaven, and taking our nature, that He could accomplish his gracious purpose in our behalf. We shall better understand in what this necessity consisted, when we consider the next Particular presented in the text.

II. He hath *redeemed* his People.

To *redeem* is to deliver out of bondage, or captivity, by the payment of a price. When, therefore, it is said that the Lord has redeemed us, or has paid a price for our deliverance, it is implied that we were in a state of bondage or captivity. And this is the state of men by nature. They are prisoners to the Justice of God, shut up under his righteous sentence to condemnation. Offenders against his holy law, they here incurred the penalty which is due to their offences. Having forfeited the favour of the Almighty, and provoked the severity of his wrath, they have been delivered up by Him in bondage to Satan, and to their own lusts, reserved for the judgement of the great day. Such is by nature the state of men. And what hinders them from being set free? What prevents the Almighty from remitting the

sentence, and restoring the captives to liberty? His own Justice and Holiness prevent Him. He could not forgive men, and release them from this bondage, without impeaching his own character, and bringing his own glorious perfections into suspicion. Some satisfaction must be made to his Justice. Something must be done, by which it may be made to appear that God in remitting the punishment of sin is still just and holy; and that, while He pardons and releases the offender, He still abhors the offence. — But where could such a satisfaction be found? Man could not find it. He had no consideration to lay down: no price to give for his redemption. But God could do what man could not do. His wisdom could provide a sufficient satisfaction to his own Justice. His mercy could find a price for our redemption. And what was this price, but the blood of his incarnate Son, which was shed as a ransom for the sin of the world? Thus He is said to have "purchased the Church with his own blood." * Thus St. Paul declares that we are "redeemed not with corruptible things, as with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ." "In whom (says St. Paul) we have redemption through his blood, even

* Acts, xx. 28.

the forgiveness of sins." With such a sacrifice the Divine Justice was satisfied. It was plain, when so great a ransom was required, that sin was not a light and trifling thing; and God, in justifying the sinner, showed Himself to be just. Pleased therefore with this sacrifice, accepting this ransom, He opened the prison-door, and proclaimed liberty to the captives. He reverses the sentence of condemnation; releases them from the power of Satan; and sends His Spirit to free them from the dominion of their lusts. Here, then, we see the *necessity* of which we spake under the former head. We see *why* the Lord *thus* visited his people. He visited in order that He might redeem them. He came into this world as man, that as man He might die, and so might make satisfaction for sin in the nature which had sinned. The full effect of this gracious and wonderful interposition we shall more clearly contemplate on considering the third Particular submitted to our notice in the text.

III. He "hath raised up a Horn of Salvation for us." This expression of a *Horn* of Salvation is a figurative expression; the meaning of which may be thus explained. The principal defence and the greatest strength of horned cattle lie in their horns. It is with these weapons that they attack

their enemies and defend themselves. Hence in Scripture a Horn is used as an emblem of strength. Thus Moses, comparing Joseph to a young bullock, says, "His horns are like the horns of unicorns;" that is, his strength and power shall be very great. So in the Psalms we find it said, "I will make the horn of David to bud;" that is, I will make his power and glory to flourish and increase. In like manner, the expression in the text denotes the *strength* of the salvation which is there spoken of. A Horn of Salvation means a *strong* Salvation. And, indeed, in the other translation used in the service of our church, the phrase is rendered after this meaning, "He hath raised up a *mighty* salvation for us." Here, then, we see the full effect of the merciful interposition in our behalf. The Lord, having visited and redeemed us, hath raised up a mighty Salvation for us. Having taken on himself our nature, and having given His life a ransom for our sins, He has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. Through his incarnation and death, He has wrought out a Salvation suited to all their wants, and mighty for pulling down the strong-holds of sin and Satan. The *strength* of this salvation lies in the Glorious Person by whom it has been wrought. Being God and man in one Christ, He is able to save to

the uttermost all who come unto God by Him. His precious blood-shedding was a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. Having "died for our offences, He is now risen for our justification;" and, being set down at the right hand of the Majesty on High, He hath all power in heaven and in earth, and will reign till He has put all enemies under his feet. Thus he is become a *Horn of Salvation* to all His people; to all those who flee to him for refuge and put their trust in His mercy and promises. He will save them from all their enemies. He will deliver them from the guilt and punishment of sin. He will free them from its power. He will rescue them from Satan. He will ransom them from the grave. He will redeem them from Hell. He will defend them as with a shield. He will gladden them with his presence. He will guide them with his counsel. He will give unto them eternal life: and none shall be able to pluck them out of his hands. — "Blessed, then, be the Lord God of Israel, who hath *so* visited and redeemed his people: and hath raised up *such* a salvation for us in the House of his Servant David." "O sing unto the Lord a new song, for He hath done marvellous things: His right hand, and His holy arm, hath gotten him the victory." "Sing, O

ye heavens, for the Lord hath done it; shout ye lower parts of the earth; break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein; for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel."— How devoutly is it to be wished, that such were the genuine language of every heart! that every mouth could truly adopt these lively expressions of praise and joy!

But, alas! to many these glad tidings of salvation convey no joy: by many, if heard at all, they are heard with indifference, or even with disgust. How comes it thus to pass? Are not all men interested in these tidings? Are not all men by nature under bondage to sin and Satan, and consequently in need of this mighty salvation? Yes, most assuredly. But all men have not faith. They do not give credit to what the Scriptures tell them of their state by nature. They do not believe that they are prisoners shut up unto condemnation. They do not believe that sin has rendered them obnoxious to the divine judgements; that the wrath of God abideth on them; and that, as unpardoned sinners, they have nothing to look forward to, but to fiery indignation, which shall destroy the adversary. Tell them all these things, they will not believe them. Show them the plain word of God in confirmation of these truths, they will not be convinced.

They take up some strange unscriptural notions, and satisfy themselves with the presumptuous hope, that they "shall do well at last." Though they should ever die in their sins, yet they trust that they shall escape, and consequently have no fears, no apprehensions respecting their souls.—Now, to such persons, what joy, what pleasure can it be to hear that God hath visited and redeemed his people? Whether Christ have come into the world or not, whether He have died to purchase pardon for sinners, or not, is to them a matter of no concern. How, then, can they rejoice at it? They feel no need of what he has done and suffered. In their own opinion they are whole, and want not a Physician. How then can they value his attendance, or be thankful for his prescriptions? In a word, the Gospel is hid to them; for the God of this World has blinded their minds, that they cannot see. Led captive by Satan, enslaved to their own lusts, fast bound to the World, they yet feel not the chain, but deem themselves to be free. How then can they rejoice at the offers of Redemption? Would that these words might reach their hearts, and might remove the veil from their eyes! Conscious of their guilt, convinced of their danger, and trembling with apprehension, how highly would they *then* prize the glad tidings of

Salvation! How feelingly would they then join in praising God for His mercy in that He hath visited and redeemed His people, and hath raised up a Horn of Salvation for them! May God teach them to sing this song with the spirit, and with the understanding! May He open the blind eyes; that, knowing the day of *their* visitation, they may yet turn unto the Lord, and serve Him in newness of life!

"To you, however, who believe, He is precious." You who have been taught the Truth as it is in Jesus, if, indeed, ye know Him; you who feel your sins, who lament your corruptions, who groan for Deliverance from this body of Sin and Death, you know the value of Redemption. You rejoice in the glorious tidings, which the text brings to your remembrance. You can feelingly adopt its language; and can bless the Lord for His mercy, in having come to visit us in great humility, and to raise up a mighty Salvation for us.

Well, my Brethren, rejoice in this Salvation. It is your privilege to rejoice in it. The Lord Himself, who came to visit and redeem you, has said, that "your Joy should be full." His prophet has set you an example to this effect. "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall

fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my Salvation."* His Apostle has given you a command to this effect. "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice." But while you thus rejoice; while you joy and glory in this Salvation, this mighty Salvation, raised up for you; O see, that it is indeed a Salvation to you; a Salvation from the Love and the Power of Sin; a Salvation from the Love and the Fear of the World. See that you are redeemed by it from all iniquity. See that you are redeemed by it from your vain conversation. You may glory in your privilege. You may joy in your Salvation. But your glory is but vain glory, and your joy but as the crackling of thorns, if the Redemption, which you profess to have received, has not wrought a new work in your Soul; has not greatly humbled you; has not mortified the pride and lust of your heart; has not brought you down, as a condemned, polluted, miserable Sinner, at the foot of the Cross; and has not inspired you with a holy desire and purpose of leading a new life, and of bringing forth the fruits of righteousness. That

* Habakkuk, iii. 17, 18.

only is Salvation, which saves us from ourselves; which "casts down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and brings into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." Never rest satisfied, never suppose, that you have attained, till you possess this inward, this experimental evidence, that you are indeed an Heir of Salvation. Be not, however, cast down. Bear in mind that this Salvation is a *mighty* Salvation. Your Saviour is mighty; all-mighty; able to save to the uttermost. Be sincere before Him. Give yourself up to *Him* really, and from the heart, without partiality, and without hypocrisy, and He will save *you* to the uttermost. You shall experience his power. You shall find him mighty. He shall make you more than a Conqueror, and in due time shall put all enemies under your feet.

SERMON XIX.

A RIGHT STATE OF HEART DESCRIBED AND ENFORCED.

ACTS, viii. 21.

Thou hast neither Part nor Lot in this Matter: for thy Heart is not right in the Sight of God.

IF we read the chapter from which these words are taken, we shall find, that they were spoken to a man, who, while he professed himself a disciple of Christ, still retained a worldly, covetous, and wicked heart. He believed and had been baptized; but notwithstanding this outward appearance of religion, he plainly showed that no real change had taken place within. St. Peter therefore openly addressed him in the words of the text: "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God." The Apostle neither flattered the formal professor, nor spared the hypocrite, nor encouraged the self-deceiver,

With great faithfulness he admonished this sinner of his state and danger: and in so doing has reminded us of a very important truth; namely, that whatever a man's religious profession may be, yet if his heart be not right in the sight of God, he is in reality no Christian, nor has any share in the blessings and privileges of the Gospel.

Perhaps there is no truth more generally admitted than this. Most persons, when pressed on the subject, are ready to allow that in religion the state of the heart is every thing. But how few are there, who make a practical application of this truth to themselves! Where shall we find the man, who puts this question to himself, 'Is *my* 'heart right in the sight of God?' Or if he go so far, how rarely does he go any farther! How rarely does he enquire what is meant by having his heart right in the sight of God! If conscience at times remind him of the danger of not having it right, yet how soon is he satisfied with his state! How quickly does he conclude that he has nothing to fear! What little pains does he take to examine himself; to discover what the state of his heart really is, and what it ought to be!

Possibly, my brethren, this may be the case with ourselves. It may be, that we have nover seriously enquired into the state

of our own heart; but have rather taken for *granted* that all is right, than have *proved* it to be so by a close and careful examination. It may be that we have never attentively considered, *when* a man's heart is right in the sight of God, nor *wherein* the necessity of its being so consists.

These are two points which the text offers to our notice; and which, with the view of leading you, through God's blessing, to a profitable consideration of the subject, I shall endeavour to explain.

I. By a man's heart we are to understand his prevailing views, dispositions, and desires. When these are such, as his situation and his circumstances require them to be, then his heart is right in the sight of God. What then are the situation and circumstances of man? He is a sinner under a dispensation of mercy. By sin he has lost God's favour and ruined his soul. But by grace he is placed in such a situation, and under such circumstances, that he may recover God's favour and save his soul. The offers of Salvation are made to him. The way of Salvation is laid open to him. He is called on to accept these offers, and to walk in this way. When, therefore, he obeys this call, when his prevailing views, dispositions, and desires are such as, in this situation, and under these circumstances, they

ought to be, then his heart is right in the sight of God. — Let us see what are the particulars in which this state of heart consists.

1. When the heart is in a right state, it is deeply humbled before God on account of its sinfulness. God abhors sin, and condemns the sinner. The sinner then must abhor sin, and condemn himself, or his heart cannot be right in the sight of God. How can things be otherwise; God sees that all men are great sinners; that sin is a dreadful evil; that no excuse can be made for it; and that all attempts to justify it are vain and presumptuous. When a man, then, esteems himself to be a little sinner; or perhaps hardly a sinner at all; when he thinks lightly of sin in general, and still more lightly of his own sin in particular; when he endeavours to excuse, or even to justify whatever he has done amiss; it must be clear, that so long as this is the state of his heart, it cannot be right before God. While *his* views of sin and of himself are so widely different from God's views: while *he* favours his sins, and God abhors them; while *he* justifies himself, and God condemns him; while such is the proud and impenitent state of his heart, how is it possible that it can be right in the sight of God? In order to be right, it must be greatly changed

He must see things as God sees them. He must think of sin as God thinks of it. He must confess and feel his own depravity. He must take shame to himself because of his impurity, in the sight of a holy God; and must lie utterly confounded and abased at the recollection of his own vileness, contrasted with the Divine Glory and Majesty. Such is the humbled state of heart which becomes man as a Sinner; and such, therefore, is its state, when it is right in the sight of God.

2. Another mark of a man's heart being in a right state, is that he thankfully believes in Jesus Christ for the pardon of his sins. God, who is rich in mercy, is not willing that Sinners should die eternally. He hath, therefore, provided for them a way of Salvation. He hath showed them how their sins may be pardoned; what they must do to recover His favour; and by what means they may obtain eternal life. So long, then, as a man refuses to comply with this gracious purpose; so long as he rejects these offers of pardon and peace; so long as he wilfully continues at enmity with his Maker; how is it possible that his heart can be right in the sight of God? It cannot be right. It must be in a state displeasing and offensive to Him. It never can be right till he obey the Gospel, and comply with the terms

of it. And what are these terms? "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "Come unto Him, and He will give you rest." "Take His yoke upon you, and you shall find rest unto your souls." These are the invitations, the Commands of the Gospel. These are the *Terms* with which it calls on us to comply. In other words, God in the Gospel speaks to us thus: 'Sinners, I have seen and pitied your lost 'condition. You have broken my holy law, 'and incurred a dreadful punishment. I 'wish not your destruction: but without 'some sufficient satisfaction to my Justice 'and Holiness, I cannot pardon you. *You* 'can never find such a satisfaction: but I 'have found it for you. I have given my 'only-begotten Son to be a Sacrifice for 'your Sins. I have set Him forth as a propitiation through faith in His blood, for 'the remission of your sins. I have given 'Him to die on the Cross. I have raised 'Him from the dead. I have set Him at 'my own right hand in heavenly places; 'that whosoever believeth on Him shall not 'perish, but shall have everlasting life. 'Look then at Him by faith. Receive Him 'for your Saviour. Believe on him with 'the heart. So shall you be justified from 'all things. Your sins shall be forgiven:

'your souls shall be saved: your everlasting 'happiness shall be secured.'

Thus God speaks in the Gospel. How does the heart, which is right in His sight, reply? It replies, 'Lord, I humbly and 'thankfully embrace thy gracious offers. I 'know that I am a lost and guilty creature. 'I am far off from Thee, and if left to my-'self must perish. I deserve to perish, but, 'blessed be thy name, there is mercy with 'Thee. Thou hast given me a Saviour, even 'thy Son Jesus Christ; and I joyfully re-'ceive him as *my* Saviour. I look to Him: 'I trust in Him: I desire only to be found 'in Him. His death is my only plea. His 'righteousness is my only safety. I hope 'that for His sake thou art reconciled to 'me. Lord, I believe; help thou my un-'belief.'

Such is the language which becomes a Sinner under a dispensation of mercy. Such, therefore, is the language of a man's heart, when it is right in the sight of God. But,

3. Another particular is yet to be noticed. The Man whose heart is in the state described, longs after holiness. He not only humbly condemns himself because of his guilt; he not only thankfully believes in Jesus Christ for the pardon of his sins: but he earnestly desires to be made holy, to be

thoroughly weaned from the love of sin, and to be entirely freed from the power of it. God is holy and loves holiness, and would have all men to be holy, even as He is holy. How is it possible, then, for the heart to be right in his sight, if it does not love what He loves, and desire to be what He is? If men are anxious to have their sins pardoned, only that they may escape punishment, while they have no anxiety to be made free from sin, that they may serve God and walk in newness of life; they clearly have not those views, dispositions, and desires which become their situation and circumstances. They show that they are ignorant of God and of their own heart, and of the whole design of the Gospel. God, in having given to them the Gospel, intends their deliverance, not only from the pains of hell, but also from the power of sin. He knows that without this deliverance, there can be no real salvation for them. He knows that so long as the soul willingly serves sin, it can never be happy. Therefore he says to it, "Be thou holy, for I am holy." And when a man's heart is right, under a conviction of the same truths, he says, 'I desire to be holy, that I 'may be happy. I would not willingly obey 'sin in any of the lusts thereof. I long to 'serve God, with all my powers. I grieve 'that I do not serve him better. Lord,

'make me a partaker of thy holiness. Break 'the chains of sin, with which I am tied 'and bound. Give me victory over my 'inward enemies, and deliver me from this 'body of sin and death, which cleaves to 'me, distresses me, and hinders my going 'in thy ways.' So speaks the man whom I am attempting to describe. — On the whole, we see *when* a man's heart is right in the sight of God. I show,

II. Wherein the necessity of its being so consists.

It consists in this; that, until a man's heart be in the state described, he has "no part nor lot in the matter:" he is a stranger to true religion, and has no share nor interest in the blessings of the Gospel. There are several arguments by which this conclusion may be proved.

In the first place, till a man's heart be thus right in the sight of God, he can have *no Interest in the promises of the Gospel.* Call to mind what these Promises are, as well as the persons to whom they are given. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God." "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." "God giveth grace to the humble." "Whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sins, shall find mercy." Again, "This is the promise which God hath given us, even eternal life; and this

life is in his Son." "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." "By Him all that believe are justified from all things." — Farther, "Sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the Law, but under Grace." "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." — Such are the Promises of the Gospel: and how, then, is it possible for a man to have any share or lot in the matter, whose heart is not right in the sight of God? If he humble and condemn not himself on account of his sins; if he believe not in Jesus Christ for the pardon of them; if he desire not deliverance from the love and power of them, what has he to do, what *can* he have to do with these Promises? They are not given to such as him. They are given to the humble, to the believing, to the seekers after Holiness. He does not answer to this description; consequently he can have no interest in the mercy and blessedness contained in them.

In the second place, till a man's heart be right in the sight of God, he can *neither perform the Duties, nor taste even the present Pleasures* of Religion. To perform the Duties of Religion, is not merely to go through the forms and ceremonies of religious worship. This a man may do, let his heart be in a state ever so contrary to the

one described. To perform the Duties of Religion, as it is here meant, is to perform them acceptably to God, in a spiritual manner, with a penitent, a believing, and an holy frame of mind. But how can this be done by those who are unnumbled in heart, who have no living Faith in Jesus Christ, nor any real desire after holiness? Such persons cannot pray to God, cannot worship Him, cannot serve Him, as he requires. They may offer to Him lip-service; but that will not satisfy God. They cannot worship Him with the heart, which is the only service that he will accept; and, consequently, not performing the Duties of Religion, they can clearly have no share in its privileges.

Neither can they taste even the present Pleasures of Religion. True Religion brings great pleasures in this life. But those only whose hearts are right in the sight of God can enjoy and relish them. Others can know nothing of them, and therefore cannot taste them. Consider what these pleasures are. They are pleasures springing from a sense of pardon; from a hope of mercy; from God's love shed abroad in the heart; from communion with Him; from confidence in his fatherly protection; from the consolations of his Spirit; from a consciousness of being in Christ; from an increasing experience of his power and grace in the

soul struggling with our corruptions, and giving us the victory.

Now, what can the man who continues unhumbled, unbelieving, and unholy, know of these Pleasures? He feels not his sins, values not the Saviour, has no confidence towards God, nor desires to know a work of grace on his heart. In this state, it is not possible that he can taste the present pleasures of Religion. They are nothing to Him. He can see nothing in them that he should desire them. He is a stranger to the peculiar happiness of the Gospel, and, consequently, has no share nor lot in the matter.

In the third place, till a man's heart be right with God, he can have *no Meetness for the enjoyment of heavenly happiness in the life to come.* The great end of the Gospel is to fit men for heaven; to make them happy, by making them holy. Its main object is to produce in them that mind, and those dispositions, which will qualify them for enjoying the pleasures which are at God's right hand for evermore. Now though we know but little of these heavenly pleasures, yet there are some things which are clearly represented as forming a considerable part of the happiness of the Saints in light. They see and serve God. They are with Jesus Christ, they behold his glory, and sing his praises. Thus our Lord Himself, describing

the Blessedness of the pure in heart, says, that "they shall see God:" and in another place we read, that "his servants shall serve Him, and shall see his face." So also in that memorable intercession which Christ offered in behalf of his followers, He prays, as the completion of their happiness, "I will that they may be with me where I am, and behold my glory." Thus also St. John in his vision saw the whole multitude of redeemed sinners in heaven falling down before the Lamb, and singing a new song, saying, "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every tongue, and kindred, and people, and nation." "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and glory, and blessing." But if such be the happiness of Heaven, what share, what interest can *they* have in it whose hearts are not right in the sight of God? How can the unhumbled, the unbelieving, and the unholy, find any pleasure in seeing and serving God: for they love Him not, and dislike His service? How can they find any pleasure in being with Jesus Christ, in beholding His glory, and ascribing to Him praise, and wisdom, and blessing; for they know nothing of Him, nor feel any love and gratitude to Him? Heaven, then, would not be Heaven to them. They have

no taste for the happiness of it; no *meetness* for its blessed employments and delights: and, consequently, they have no part nor lot in the matter. We see, then, in what consists the *necessity* of the heart's being right with God.

Upon the whole, my brethren, let the following admonition be deeply impressed on your minds. Never think well of your state, nor be satisfied with your spiritual condition, till you have good reason for believing that your heart is right in the sight of God. Remember that nothing will supply the want of this. A Christian name, a Christian education, a Christian profession, an apparent conversion, can profit you nothing without a Christian heart. So long as this is wanting, "you have no part nor lot in the matter." You are a stranger to real Christianity. You cannot trust in its precious *promises*. You cannot *spiritually* perform the duties which it enjoins. You know nothing of the *present* peace and happiness which it gives. You have no *meetness* for the *future* enjoyments to which it leads. Calling yourself a Christian, perhaps believing that you have even a zeal for Christ, you are "yet in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." — Examine, then, and search your heart. Try it by the marks which have been set before you. See, whether your prevailing views,

dispositions, and desires, be such as your situation and circumstances require them to be. Such as in a sinner under a dispensation of mercy they ought to be. See, whether you humbly condemn yourself; whether you truly believe in Jesus Christ; whether you anxiously long after holiness. Recollect for your encouragement, that the same Gospel, which enjoins this state of heart on all its followers, is able also to work it in them. It is the glory of the Gospel that it has power to renew and sanctify the soul, and to make it meet for heaven. The Holy Spirit is ready to produce repentance, faith, and holiness, in all who earnestly and diligently seek these blessings of Him. May you, my brethren, seek them in this manner! So shall your heart be right in the sight of God. So shall you have that part and lot in the matter, which shall never be taken away from you.

SERMON XX.

IMPORTANCE OF REFLECTING ON OUR NATURAL STATE OF GUILT AND CORRUPTION.

ISAIAH, li. 1.

Hearken to me, Ye that follow after Righteousness; Ye, that seek the Lord. Look unto the Rock whence Ye are hewn, and to the Hole of the Pit whence Ye are digged.

IT is a peculiar beauty and excellence in the Sacred Scriptures, and a proof of their divine original as well as of the sameness of true religion under every dispensation, that what is addressed to the Church at one period, is frequently no less applicable to it at another. The same admonitions, instructions, and consolations, which the Jewish Church received from the *words* of the Prophets, are conveyed by their *writings* to the Christian Church: and in the one application are oftentimes no less profitable and appropriate, than they were in the other.

— That such is the case with the passage which I have read for the text, I shall endeavour in this discourse to show.

These words were addressed by the prophet Isaiah, to the pious remnant of true believers among the Jews; for they are described as those who "follow after righteousness and seek the Lord." At this time, however, as it appears from the context, they were in an afflicted and a discouraged state. And such a state would be attended with its peculiar trials and temptations; and, consequently, would stand in need of appropriate direction and support. What direction, then, does the Prophet give? What support does he point out to them? He calls them to the exercise of deep and serious reflection. He bids them candidly and closely to compare past things with present circumstances, and thus to see whether there was not ground for consolation and encouragement: for this is the meaning and object of the figurative exhortation in the text, "Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged." — Was it on a public account that they were concerned? Were they grieved and discouraged at the depressed state of the Church? Let them call to mind how small its beginnings had been; how unpromising its commencement; when the

Lord had "called Abraham alone," a single individual, without any apparent prospect of issue, and yet had so blessed and increased him, that out of this Rock, the whole nation and Church of Israel had been produced. Were their afflictions and discouragements of a private nature? Were they cast down under a sense of their own present trials and troubles? Let them reflect on their natural condition; on the state in which they had been found; on the way by which they had been led; on "the hole of the pit out of which they had been digged;" the depth of corruption, guilt, and misery from which they had been originally brought. If they were now built up "as lively stones," in the spiritual temple of God; yet let them call to mind the rough materials out of which they had been formed, and the expence, and trouble, and time, which it had cost, to fit them for their present station. Reflections of this nature would tend to instruct and comfort them under existing circumstances; would point out their duty, and minister consolation.

From this explanation of the text, I would deduce the following important Inference, namely, That it is the duty, and will be for the benefit of every true servant of God, occasionally to reflect, with due seriousness, on his own original state, on the rise and

progress of religion in his own soul, and of the experience which he has thus individually had of the Divine power, goodness, and mercy.

With a view to a practical application of this Inference, I shall endeavour more particularly,

I. To point out the persons here addressed.

II. To explain the Exhortation addressed to them.

I. The persons addressed in the text, we have already observed, are the true servants of God: but, in more particularly pointing them out, we must attend to the description here given of them. And in this description we shall perceive a striking illustration of the fact noticed above, namely, of the sameness of true religion at all times, and under every dispensation. The Persons here described are those, who "follow after righteousness and seek the Lord." — Such were the true people of God under the Jewish Church. And how exactly does this description accord to the true people of God under the Christian Church? How could they be more properly described, than as Persons who "follow after righteousness, and seek the Lord?" Attend to the particulars of the description. They "seek the Lord." — The expression to *seek*, implies *desire* and *endeavour*. The persons here spoken

of *desire* to have the Lord for their God. They have in their judgements decidedly chosen Him for their portion; and they long above all things to be at peace with Him, to walk with Him, to have communion with Him. Convinced that sin, if persisted in, must be their ruin; that the world with all its allurements cannot make them happy; that idols cannot profit them; they have renounced all these vanities; they have ceased to trust in them, and to be influenced by them. Their desire now is to obtain that peace, and happiness, and honour, which come from God only. It is the secret language of their hearts, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us." "Whom have we in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that we desire besides Thee." And while they thus supremely *desire* the favour of God, they anxiously and diligently *endeavour* to obtain it. They use the appointed means, in which God hath promised to reveal Himself to man. They wait upon Him in those ordinances, in which He is graciously to be found; in which He causes His Beauty and Glory to be seen; in which He gladdens the heart and refreshes the Souls of those who search for Him.

But especially the Persons here spoken of seek the Lord, by "following after

righteousness." This is the other part of the Description. Righteousness in Scripture has a twofold meaning. It sometimes denotes that external Righteousness, which is imputed to the true believer in Christ, and in this sense it signifies Justification. At other times it refers to that internal Holiness, which is the work of the Spirit of Christ in the believer's heart, and in this sense it means Sanctification. In the passage before us, we may understand it in both these senses. Those who seek the Lord are following after Righteousness, both Justification and Sanctification; and following after them in the way, in which alone, according to the covenant of mercy, these blessings are to be found. They are seeking them by faith in Jesus Christ, in dependence on His promises, and through the power of His Spirit. Deeply convinced of their own guilt, and of their utter insufficiency to save themselves, they are looking for pardon, acceptance, and eternal life, solely through the sufferings and obedience of Him, who was their Substitute and Surety. Their only hope of heaven is founded on His merits. They are earnestly longing with the Apostle St. Paul, "to win Christ, and to be found in Him, not having their own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the Righteous-

ness which is of God by Faith." They are also following after holiness: that "holiness, without which they know, that no man shall see the Lord." They hunger and thirst after Sanctification, no less than after Justification. While they desire to be "found in Christ," they also desire to "know Him and the power of His Resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings." Sin, which they once loved, and practised, and served, is now felt to be their burden, their shame, and their abhorrence; and to mortify and subdue it is their daily desire and constant aim. Taught by the Grace of God, which bringeth Salvation, they have learned to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts; and under the influence of the Holy Spirit are living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.

Such are the true servants of God: such they are now: such, according to the measure of light vouchsafed to them, they were in the Prophet's time. And such are the Persons described and addressed in the text. I proceed,

II. To explain the Exhortation addressed to them.

This we have already seen is conveyed in figurative language: "Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged." But

the meaning is obvious, 'Look back unto 'yourselves. Consider what you once were; 'in what a depth of apostasy and misery 'you were originally sunk. Reflect on the 'natural hardness of your heart: on its in-'sensibility to Spiritual Things; on its 'dreadful alienation from God.' See this state of things exemplified,

First. In your original Conversion to God.

Secondly. In your subsequent Conduct towards Him.

1. Retrace in your memory the *Circumstances of your original Conversion* to God. Cannot you call to mind the time when you were "living without God in the world," walking in the flesh, and altogether carnally-minded? Perhaps you were living in the practice of gross sin, in the allowed indulgence of some unlawful passion, or in the immoderate gratification of some lawful appetite. Or if this were not exactly the case, you yet were making the world your God, devoted to its cares, its pleasures, or its honours, choosing to have your portion in it, and looking for your enjoyments from it. At any rate Self was your idol; the God whom you served and worshipped, and were resolved to gratify. So that in some way or other you fell under the general description which St. Paul gives of mankind, as "children of disobedience; among whom, also,

(he pursues) we all had our conversation in times past, in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as others." * It may indeed have been, that you were not entirely without some apprehensions of God, nay, without some scriptural notions respecting Him, and the way of salvation: and possibly you even professed yourself his servant, and frequented his ordinances. But, notwithstanding even this form of godliness, you are now sensible, that there was no *spirit* in it. You had no real *spiritual* views and apprehensions of God. No practical abiding impression was made on your heart. You saw not, you felt not that you were a lost and miserable sinner ready to perish; who had no strength, or goodness of your own; and must be saved, if saved at all, by omnipotent grace. You might perhaps allow that the Scriptures contained some statements of this kind. But every *personal* application of it to *yourself* you strongly resisted. Convictions of *your own* guilt, and corruption, and misery you would not admit; and as to spiritual, vital Religion, if you did not treat the mention of it with ridicule and reproach, yet you heard of it with indifference, or regarded it as delusion. Recollect whether in some such respects as these you did not evidence the

* Ephes. ii. 3.

hardness of your heart, its alienation from God, and its insensibility to heavenly and spiritual things.

And when the season of the Lord's mercy to you drew near; when the Spirit of God, through the ministry of the word, began to dispel this darkness, and to impress new convictions on your mind: how often and how long did you resist these motions! How slow were you in admitting the truths disclosed to you! How unwilling to give up your own preconceived notions, your good opinion of yourself, your inward opposition to spiritual religion! Was not the natural pride and unbelief of your heart at this period incontestably proved? Though driven from one false foundation of hope, you had recourse to another. You tried every way of establishing your own righteousness, and of confirming your own peace; till absolute necessity compelled you to flee for refuge to the hope of the Gospel, and to cast yourself perishing on the mercy of Christ. And even then how backward were you at believing His promises! How distrustful of His word! How long tossed, it may be, with doubts and fears, before you were brought confidently to take Him as your Saviour, and entirely to rely on His promises. Surely, in retracing the steps of your original Conversion to God (if they in any

degree resemble those which have been described), you must be strongly reminded of "the rock whence you were hewn, and of the hole of the pit whence you were digged."

See the same state of things exemplified,

2. *In your subsequent conduct towards God.* Since the time in which you first knew Him in truth, and gave yourself up to serve Him in the Gospel of His Son, what has been the state of your heart, of its affections, its tempers, and its dispositions? Have all these been uniformly such, as this surrender and profession imply and require? Have there been no remaining corruptions, no lustings of the flesh, no relicts of the old man still abiding and working in the soul? Have the members of the body of sin been *all* mortified? Has *every* offending limb been *totally* cut off? Has there been no perverseness in the will; no disaffection in the heart; no coldness in devotion; no backwardness in forming good resolutions; no tardiness in accomplishing them; no yielding to temptation; no failing in circumspection and watchfulness; no backsliding in practice; no revival of former sins; no returning to former habits; no desires after forbidden objects, no fear of man; no dread of the cross; no reluctance to encounter shame and reproach for Christ's sake? Alas, my brother, has there not, on the contrary, been too much of

all these things? Retrace in your memory the Lord's dealings with *you* from the time you have known Him, and your conduct towards *Him*. What kindness, what goodness, what forbearance, what long-suffering on His part! What ingratitude, what distrust, what impatience, what provocation on your part! How small is the progress which you have made in holiness, compared with the means and opportunities which you have enjoyed! How dull have you been in understanding the truths and directions of Scripture: how slow in obeying them! When brought through your own folly or sin into circumstances of difficulty and danger, how prone have you been to quarrel with those very means, which the Lord's wisdom and mercy have devised for your deliverance! How often have you wandered from the fold, and, but for the care of the Good Shepherd, would have perished for ever! See in this review of your Conduct the utter depravity of the natural heart, its alienation from God, its insensibility to spiritual things. "Look unto the rock whence ye were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye were digged."

From this view of the Persons described in the text, and of the Exhortation addressed to them, I shall now proceed to make a practical application of the subject.

My Christian brethren, "ye that follow

after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord, look unto the rock whence ye were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye were digged." — Reflect on your deep apostasy from God; on the corruption of your nature; on the hardness of your heart, as illustrated in your original Conversion to God, and in your subsequent Conduct towards Him — and say, *What Lessons* do these Reflections teach?

Do they not inculcate *Humility* and *Self-abasement?* Can you think *seriously* on these things, and not find your pride to be mortified and subdued? Call to mind that you were once in a state of hopeless misery, covered with guilt and exposed to ruin; but at the same time so blind that you saw not, that you suspected not your danger. But in this state the Lord freely made Himself known to you. He found you, when you sought Him not. You had done nothing to merit His Favour, but much to provoke His wrath. Yet He had pity on you. He "brought you by a way that you knew not of, He led you in paths that you had not known. He made darkness light before you, and crooked things straight. These things He did unto you — and has not since forsaken you." Notwithstanding your many provocations, He has not been weary of doing you good. Notwithstanding your negligences, and mistakes,

and infirmities, He has not discarded you from his service. He still bears with you; employs you; accepts you; treats you with kindness; regards you with favour, and designs your happiness. Can you think on all this unmerited mercy; on all this undeserved, spontaneous loving-kindness to you; and not be filled with the deepest shame and humiliation of heart? Are you not ready to exclaim with Holy Job, "Behold I am vile: what shall I answer Thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth." "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

Do not the same reflections inculcate also and promote the graces of *Patience*, *Contentment*, and *Resignation?* Was such, indeed, originally your lost condition? Was such your state by nature and by practice? Have you partaken so much mercy? Have you been delivered, freely, "without money, and without price," from so much misery? Have you even now so much ingratitude remaining in your heart? Are you oftentimes so rebellious, and at all times so unprofitable? Do you, however, *still* experience so much kindness, and daily receive so many blessings? Is this the case? And can you complain, and murmur, if in some respects your inclinations are crossed and your desires unsatisfied? Surely murmuring and discontent become not you; *you*, who participate in so

many unmerited gifts. "Look unto the Rock whence you were hewn." Had it not been for the Lord's mercy, instead of being now a living stone in His spiritual building, you would still have been a part of that natural Rock, an unshapen mass of sin and unbelief. And after such distinguishing kindness, can you object to the place which He has thought fit to assign to you in his edifice? Can you complain because He has not allotted to you a more elevated, a more conspicuous, or a more honourable station? "Look unto the pit whence you were digged:" that pit "in which there is no water; and out of which the Lord has brought you by the blood of His covenant." Look at that pit of darkness, and corruption. Compare it with the light, and life, and liberty, which you now enjoy; with the privileges vouchsafed to you, with the glory set before you: and after this review, after this comparison, can you feel dissatisfied with your lot? Surely you must rather exclaim with the Apostle, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content:" or with pious Eli, "It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good."

These Reflections teach also another lesson. They strongly inculcate the *Necessity of a continual dependence on divine grace* to work in you both to will and to do. Think

on your original condition; on the state of sin and death, in which you were plunged, and in which you would still have continued to be plunged, had not the Spirit of God quickened you, and put into you spiritual life; had He not taken away the heart of stone and given to you a heart of flesh; an humble, a tender, and an obedient heart. Think, I say, on these things; and see how entirely you stand in need of the same Spirit, to maintain the life which He first imparted. Without His quickening power you would to this day have been dead in trespasses and sins. Without his preventing grace you are at this day unable to think or to do any thing that is good. He, who first inspired you with holy desires, must still inspire you with them. He who first taught you to pray in the Spirit, must still teach you to pray in it. He who first enabled you to bring forth spiritual fruit, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ, must still enable you. — Pray, then, for His help. Depend upon His grace. Undertake nothing in your own strength. Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. So shall you be more than conquerors through Him that loveth you.

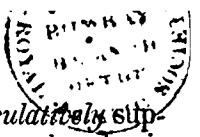
These Reflections have also a tendency to produce *Hope* and *Encouragement*. Perhaps you may at times be harassed with distressing

apprehensions as to your true interest in Jesus Christ. Having some distinct perceptions of Christian Holiness, seeing what manner of persons true Christians ought to be in all holy conversation and godliness, and comparing with this exalted standard your own defective attainments in holiness, you are ready to conclude that you are no real Christian. Finding so much evil remaining in your hearts, you are tempted to doubt whether you were ever made a partaker of renewing grace. But at such seasons, "Look unto the Rock whence you were hewn, and to the hole of the Pit whence you were digged." Call to mind your original state, the natural deadness of your heart to spiritual things. At that time you knew nothing, you felt nothing, you desired nothing in respect to true, vital, spiritual religion. Compare your state *then* with your state *now*. Now you know what spiritual religion is. You have spiritual feelings and desires. You long and endeavour after spiritual objects. Surely this is a sign of life. The dead feel not, desire not, strive not. Let these reflections allay your fears, and invigorate your hopes, though you may as yet be only a babe in Christ; yet an infant as truly lives as a full-grown man. Prove to yourself that you have life in you, by seeking after the sincere milk

of the word. Seek it and grow thereby. Prove to yourself that you are indeed a partaker of a new and holy nature, by following after holiness, and walking in newness of life.

Such are some of the Lessons here suggested to those, who, in the way which has been described, "follow after righteousness and seek the Lord."

But the subject admits also of another less exclusive application. It furnishes one lesson of general importance: for it teaches us how holy and practical in its tendency is true, vital, evangelical Religion; that Religion, which, beginning in a deep spiritual conviction of sin, leads to faith in Christ as the only source of peace, hope, and consolation, and the main spring of life and action. Religion thus described, is often encountered by prejudice, or regarded with suspicion, on the supposition that it tends to weaken the obligations to moral obedience, and to open a door to licentious and Antinomian consequences. Let, however, the use which has been made of the text show how unreasonable are such prejudices, how erroneous are such suspicions. True, vital, evangelical Religion is closely and uniformly connected with personal holiness. So intimate is the union between them, that they can never be



separated. Should any one *speculatively* suppose the contrary, it is evident, that he is entirely unacquainted with the subject on which he professes to hold his opinion. Should any one *practically* conclude that such a separation is possible, it is as evident that he has never felt the power of true Religion on his Soul. Both show their utter ignorance of the truth as it is in Jesus. Both show the need they have of coming to Him as little children, that they may be taught of God; that being born again by the regenerating influences of His Spirit, they may be brought experimentally to know, what it is to follow after righteousness, and to seek the Lord. Here is their remedy. Here, my Brethren, is your cure; your only cure, for those erroneous and distorted views of true Religion. Come humbly to Jesus Christ. Laying aside prejudice and self-conceit, cast yourself before his Throne of Mercy. Confess to Him your ignorance. Pray to Him for His Spirit to enlighten and convince you; to take of the things of Christ, and to show them unto you. So shall you find rest unto your souls. He who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, will give to you. He will give you wisdom, eventhat wisdom which is from above; "the merchandize of which is better than the mer

chandize of silver, and the gain thereof than of fine gold." — May the God of all grace and Mercy incline your hearts to seek Him! May He lead you into all Truth, and bless you with all spiritual blessings in Jesus Christ!

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